Entertaining Mr. Sloane Study Guide

Entertaining Mr. Sloane by Joe Orton

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Introduction

Entertaining Mr. Sloane was Joe Orton's first full-length play and it initiated a meteoric, three-year career that established him as one of the most significant writers of stage farce m the twentieth century This exalted stature is now supported largely by two additional full-length *plays-Loot* (1965), and *What the Butler Saw* (produced posthumously in 1969)-and to a lesser extent by four one-act plays originally written for radio and television.

Entertaining Mr. Sloane opened in London in May of 1964 in a small "fringe" or off-Broadway like theatre. Its unconventional subject matter, explicit sexual themes, and coarse humor drew contradictory reviews, as did Orton's plays throughout his career. However, by the end of June, 1964, the controversial nature of the play helped catapult it into a major London theatre and Orton's short but brilliant career was launched. The most persuasive early praise came from the extremely popular but very conventional playwright, Sir Terence Rattigan, whose craftsman-like and conventional "well made" plays (dramatic works that have a distinct five act structure over which the plot logically unfolds) had dominated British commercial theatre from the 1930s until the late 1950s. Rattigan visited the production in its first week and ensured its transfer to a "West End" or Broadway-like theatre by investing a considerable amount of money in it himself. Controversial as the play was in both London and New York, *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* also enjoyed a German production and was soon slated for a film adaptation.

Clearly influenced in his earliest work by fellow British dramatist, Harold Pinter *(The Homecoming),* Orton gradually forged a distinct comic style that distanced his work from Pinter. As critics still speak of certain plays as picturesque, they now also refer to a farce that turns grotesque. explicitly sexual, and purposefully shocking as Ortonesque.

Author Biography

Joe Orton was born in Leicester (pronounced "Les-tur"), England, an industrial city eighty miles northwest of London. on New Year's Day, 1933. The son of working-class parents-his father a gardener and his mother a factory worker - Orton was raised in a stable but emotionally barren and conventional middle-class suburban environment. His defiant homosexuality, unhappy home life. and emotionally distant relationship with his parents finally came together in the mid-1960s to produce an iconoclastic comic style that emerged in his first produced comedy-farce, *Entertaining Mr. Sloane.* Intent in this and all subsequent plays on questioning middle-class values, Orton specialized in suggesting that unconventional passions existed beneath conventional middle-class behavior and language.

As a teenager, Orton became devoted to amateur theatre, and after leaving school] and losing a number of mundane office jobs. he quite surprisingly won a scholarship in 1951 to London's very prestigious Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts (RADA). There Orton met Kenneth Halliwell, his long-time lover and sometime collaborator. After Orton graduated from RADA in 1953, he worked briefly as an actor in repertory theatre and then joined Halliwell in virtual poverty as the two lived together and worked jointly on a number of bizarre, unpublished novels. It was under the guidance of the older and more sophisticated Halliwell that Orton discovered his interest in writing.

In 1962. however, Halliwell and Orton were imprisoned for six months for stealing and defacing dozens of books from a suburban London library. The two pranksters would alter the books, often with comically obscene illustrations. and then haunt the library to observe the reactions of browsing patrons. Prison was a turning point in Orton's life.

As his biographer John Lahr put it in *Prick up Your Ears: The Biography of Joe Orton.* . "Orton found [in prison] a focus for his anger and a new detachment in his writing. .."

As he refined his satiric attitude toward middleclass culture and discovered his flair for unconventional comedy. Orton became more confident as an independent writer and less tolerant of Halliwell's insecurity. His personal relationship with Halliwell deteriorated steadily as *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* initiated Orton's meteoric rise to artistic prominence and celebrity status. Within three years his play *Loot* (1965) became an enormous success, several one-act plays written for television bolstered and widened his reputation, and *What the Butler Saw* (produced in 1969) was completed in manuscript. Orton had even been commissioned to write a screenplay-Up *against it* (produced as a play in 1979 and later re-adapted as a stage musical by musician Todd Rundgren)-which was to be the follow-up to the Beatles's film *A Hard Day* 's *Night.* Halliwell responded to Orton's sudden fame and increasing sexual infidelity with extreme jealousy, envy, and depression. On the night of August 9, 1967, as Orton slept, Halliwell bludgeoned him to death with nine blows from a hammer. Halliwell then took his own life with an overdose of sleeping pills. Despite a relatively small body of work produced during what would have been the early stage of his career, Orton's dramas have endured, finding new audiences with each subsequent decade since their creation.

Plot Summary

Act I

Entertaining Mr. Sloane begins with a dowdy, forty-ish woman named Kath showing her middleclass home to a prospective lodger, a street-wise and coarse twenty-year-old boy named Sloane whom she had met that afternoon in the public library. Kath almost immediately hints to Sloane that she is willing to have sex with him and reveals that she once had a young son out of wedlock whom she gave up for adoption. Sloane agrees to take a room in the house, revealing that he was himself brought up in an orphanage.

Kath's elderly father, Kemp, enters, and initially mistakes Sloane for his son, Ed. While Kath is in the kitchen, Kemp talks with Sloane and toasts crumpets (small cakes) over the electric logs in the fireplace. Eventually Kemp decides that he recognizes Sloane as the young hitchhiker who two years ago murdered Kemp's former boss. Kemp then stabs Sloane in the leg with the toasting fork. Kath returns from the kitchen, scolds her father for his uncivilized behavior and then ministers to Sloane's wound, insisting that Sloane remove his trousers so she can apply antiseptic and a bandage. While dressing Sloane's wound, Kath ignores the doorbell, expecting a nosy lady acquaintance who might spread rumors. She somewhat coyly attempts to seduce Sloane. Sending Sloane upstairs for a bath, Kath demands an explanation from her father, eventually sending him to Sloane's former lodging to collect the young man's belongings.

Kath's brother, Ed, then enters. A participant in some kind of vague "business" that sounds like it has underworld connections, Ed has come to get Kemp to sign papers that will commit him to an old folks home. Ed does not live in the same house with Kath and their father, but before his entrance he overheard the talk of the new tenant and now forbids Kath to take in Sloane. Ed already suspects the possibility of sexual relations between Kath and the new lodger and asserts that rumors of such behavior would hurt his reputation and livelihood.

Ed insists on meeting Sloane When he does, Ed is immediately attracted to Sloane himself. The homosexual Ed dismisses Kath, interviews Sloane, and offers him a job as his personal chauffeur. As Sloane goes to eat, Ed tells Kath he will pay Sloane's rent. Ed leaves, and Kath is finally alone with Sloane, who has re-entered from the kitchen. Kath quickly seduces the willing Sloane on the living room sofa as the first act ends.

Act II

One morning, six months later, Kath enters from a shopping trip to find Sloane lying on the sofa wearing boots, leather trousers, and a white T-shirt. Sloane explains that he is resting while Eddie works on the car because Sloane has a hangover from a late night out with three of his male friends. As he fields Kath's probing questions about women, Sloane accuses her of jealousy and attempting to run his life, threatening to leave if she

persists. Kemp enters looking for his pills but refuses Sloane's help in finding them. While Kemp babbles, Kath whispers to Sloane that she is pregnant. After Kemp leaves Sloane refuses to marry her. But to mollify Kath' Sloane turns over to her, as a token of his respect, a locket his mother had given him.

Ed enters and Joins Kath in vying for Sloane's attentions. After Sloane exits to the kitchen, Ed intimates that he might fire Sloane from his chauffeur's Job for joy-riding the previous night, but Kath says she needs her "baby" because Ed took away her other baby, the child she bore out of wedlock to Tommy, one of Ed's former friends.

When Sloane re-enters, Ed traps him into admitting he was with a woman the night before He counsels Sloane on the untrustworthiness of females. Sloane agrees to move out of the house and go with Ed once Sloane receives sufficient financial incentives.

Kemp enters and breaks his usual silence with ills son because he wants to tell Ed about Kath' s pregnancy, Sloane's crime, and about Sloane threatening and beating him. When Sloane returns and Kemp leaves the room, Ed confronts Sloane with Kemp's accusations concerning the pregnancy. Sloane claims that Kath threw herself at him. Sloane seems penitent, and Ed decides to forgive him if Sloane will promise to avoid women in the future.

Before he leaves, Ed sides with Sloane against Kemp Once alone with Kemp, Sloane menaces the old man before learning that the police have Sloane's fingerprints. Sloane then confesses the "accidental" killing of Kemp's former boss, attempting to win Kemp's silence. When Kemp threatens to go to the police, Sloane knocks the old man down behind the sofa and kicks him. When Kemp doesn't respond to Sloane's invitation to rise, Act II ends with the surprised Sloane calling for Ed rather than for Kath.

Act III

Ed enters, finds his father behind the sofa, and carries him upstairs to the old man's bedroom. When Ed returns, he reports that Kemp is dead. While Sloane is shocked and frightened, Kath seems oblivious to the seriousness of her father's condition Ed revels in his new position of power. Sloane begins to pack to leave with Ed, but Ed pretends to be intent on forcing Sloane to face the authorities until Sloane lays his hand on Ed's knee, accepts responsibility for the killing, asks for forgiveness, and promises eternal devotion.

Kath returns screaming, having discovered Kemp's body and finally realizing that her father is dead. Ed convinces Kath that Kemp had been in and coaches her about what she should say when the doctor arrives. Ed reminds her that If Sloane is tried for murder Kath will lose him, so Kath begins to see Kemp's death in a different light. Kath agrees to polish the stairs and put Kemp's new shoes on him, making it look like he slipped down the stairs. But when Sloane enters with his suitcase, Ed explains that Sloane is coming to live with him. Kath reveals her pregnancy and is shocked when she hears that Sloane has accused her of seducing him. She and Ed argue over Sloane's

affections and which one of them is best for him. When Sloane is asked to choose between the two, he chooses to leave with Ed, claiming never to have cared for Kath. Ed cruelly forces Kath to look at herself in the mirror. She sees herself as attractive until Sloane corroborates Ed's assessment of her appearance and the situation in which she now finds herself.

Under these new circumstances, Kath announces that she will describe their father's death as murder and reveal what Kemp reported about the murder of his former boss. Faced with blackmail on both sides, Sloane slaps Kath and threatens her physically In the struggle, Kath' s false teeth fallout and roll under the sofa. Then Ed comes up with the Idea of sharing Sloane, living with Sloane by himself SIX months of the year and then permitting Sloane to live six months with Kath. Kath will say that Kemp fell downstairs and Kath and Ed will exchange the locket that Sloane gave her whenever they trade Sloane. The play ends with Ed announcing that it has been a pleasant morning and with Kath sitting on the sofa eating a piece of candy.

Act 1

Act 1 Summary

Note: As is correct in British English, in this play "Mr" and other abbreviated forms of address are spelled without punctuation.

As the play begins, Kath is showing a parlor room in her house to Mr Sloane, a prospective boarder. After a brief discussion about the terms of lodging, Sloane agrees to take the room. The conversation quickly turns personal. Kath reveals that she had a son who died and that she is a widow. Without any prompting, a few moments later, Kath confesses that her son was illegitimate and that she was never married. Her sudden intimacy doesn't seem to faze Sloane, who appears to take everything in stride.

Kath becomes more and more flirtatious, finally wrapping Sloane's arms around her and giving him what she calls a "motherly kiss." Telling Sloane that he needs "a bit of luxury," Kath asks whether Sloane would prefer a rubber pillow for his bed or one with feathers. She adds: "You'll live with us then as one of the family?"

Kath's talk of family leads Sloane to declare that he was raised in an orphanage after his parents died when he was young. Kath is impressed by his air of refinement and declares that he possesses "the air of lost wealth." Sloane adds that he believes his parents were indeed wealthy and portrays them as a very respectable and upper-class couple. He declares his filial devotion to his parents' memory, telling Kath that he makes an annual trip to where they are buried to tidy up their tombs. He suggests that Kath accompany him on his next trip.

Kath notes that her lost son would be about Sloane's age now. She says that Sloane shares her son's refinement. Sloane turns his likeness to her son to his advantage, playing on her maternal affections. "I need ... understanding," he says. Kath responds to his ploy for sympathy by touching his neck and his check. She remarks on his delicate skin.

Sloane and Kath's conversation is interrupted by the appearance of Kath's father, Kemp. A man with poor vision, he initially mistakes Sloane for his son, Ed. Kath explains impatiently who Sloane is and why he's here. Kemp says they have no room to rent. Angry now, Kath scolds her father for his rudeness and tells him to entertain Mr Sloane while she goes off to prepare tea.

Sloane tells Kemp that he looks familiar, and he wonders aloud where they might have met before. Kemp says they have never crossed paths. Their conversation also turns personal, as Kemp tells Sloane about his son, to whom he never speaks. When Sloane expresses surprise at such behavior, Kemp explains why he disowned Ed. Although the explanation is veiled, it is clear that Kemp disowned his son because Ed is gay. Kemp

alludes to the fact that he caught his son and another boy having sex (referring to it as a "felony") when Ed was seventeen.

The talk turns to the seedy state of the neighborhood, where people from other areas come to dump their garbage. Sloane suggests that Kemp find someone with political pull to help him stop the littering. Kemp says he knows just the person: his boss. Unfortunately, his boss is dead, the victim of an unsolved murder that happened two years before. Sloane becomes curious, asking several questions about the murder and the ensuing investigation.

Suddenly, Kemp realizes that, in fact, the two men *have* met before. Now it is Sloane's turn to deny it. Even though Sloane reminds Kemp of his poor eyesight, Kemp swears he recognizes Sloane. With a hint of menace, Kemp says that he could "identify" Sloane if necessary. Sloane becomes defensive and insults Kemp, who responds by stabbing the young man in the leg with a fork.

Kath returns to find Sloane in pain and bleeding on the sofa. She chastises her father for his violence. Sloane says that Kemp belongs in a mental institution; "Colney Hatch" is the name of a local lunatic asylum. Kath instructs her father to go fetch some antiseptic (Dettol) for the wound. Meanwhile, Kath locates some bandages and suggests that Sloane remove his trousers so that she can nurse his wound. One moment Kath is denying that she has any ulterior motive in getting him undressed, and the next moment she is coyly praising Sloane's smooth young body. As she inspects him, she makes a strange discovery. Although Sloane is a blond, the hairs on his leg are quite dark. Sloane is rather mum about this fact.

When Sloane attempts to move to clothe himself, Kath quickly commands him to keep still. She then tells him that she's nude under her dress, and when he finds her nylon sticking between the sofa cushions, she praises her legs. When Sloane attempts to fondle her breasts, Kath backs away as though she were insulted.

Kemp reappears, and Kath tells him to go fetch Mr Sloane's suitcase from his former lodging house. Sloane leaves them to go up to his new room. After Sloane exits, Kemp attempts to convince his daughter that he has seen the young man before. As she dismisses the idea, the two of them hear a rapping at the window. Kath announces that it is her brother Ed. Kemp says he won't speak to his son and goes off to fetch Sloane's belongings.

Kath tells Ed about Sloane and that he has offered to take a room in the house. Ed protests. He says that a young man living in the house with her would cause a scandal. Kath says Sloane is a respectable young man, but her brother isn't buying it. She says she needs the money because she's going to put their father in a nursing home in the next year. Ed ignores her arguments, reminding his sister that a scandal could jeopardize his position among his associates, who are well-off, upstanding citizens.

Ed discovers Sloane's abandoned trousers and demands to meet the young man. Kath, fearing her brother's dismissal of the young boarder from the house, begs her brother

not to send Sloane away. "I'm to be his mamma," she pleads. As soon as Ed lays his eyes on the handsome young man, however, his opposition abruptly ends. As with his sister earlier, Ed's conversation with Sloane quickly turns intimate. He finds an excuse to send his sister from the room. Alone with Sloane, Ed quizzes him on his background. Ed is pleased to hear that Sloane grew up in an all-male orphanage and that he is fond of sports and other masculine pursuits. For Ed, this talk of male companionship elicits a bittersweet memory. He recalls engaging in such activities with his "mate," an allusion to his boyhood friend, Tommy, with whom he had sexual relations in his youth.

The conversation becomes explicitly erotic. Ed becomes more and more excited as he hears about the young man's physical prowess - the wrestling, the boxing and the workouts in the nude. Sloane stokes the fire, extolling the beauty of his own body and toying with Ed's fantasies. Ed cross-examines Sloane about women and, in particular, his sister. Would Sloane ever respond to Kath's sexual overtures? Sloane assures Ed that he has no interest in his sister.

Just as Kath earlier tried to entice Sloane with gifts, such as comfortable pillows and her own body, so, too, does Ed try to barter for Sloane's affections. Ed boasts of his possessions, his cars and his rich friends, as well as his ability to use his influence to benefit Sloane. He offers to make the young man his chauffeur and dress him up in a sexy uniform. They make plans to discuss the job offer over a drink.

Kath returns to the room and learns that Sloane will be working for her brother. After Sloane exits, Ed tells his sister that he is going to pay Sloane's boarding expenses and that she is not to take any money from him. Ed also forbids his sister to buy any presents for Sloane. He then mentions his plans for the next day, which include having drinks with his well-off friends. This talk of fashionable living leads Kath to suggest that she'd like to see her brother's elegant rooms at the hotel where he lives. He says that he will invite her, on one condition: that she persuade their father to speak to him. Ed grows upset as he wonders why his father will not see him.

Kemp enters just after his son has left. Kath implores her father to speak to Ed. He refuses. She pleads with him to no avail. Her father is feeling sorry for himself. He thinks he's dying. He thinks she will run off with Sloane and leave him alone. He thinks she doesn't love him. He thinks she'll put him in a nursing home. She evades the issue by sending him off to bed.

After Kath's father leaves, she slips into a see-through nightgown and calls Sloane back to the parlor. She creates a romantic mood with lighting and scents. She pretends to be preoccupied with knitting as he appears. She protests that the lighting, which she arranged, is exposing her naked body to him. He tries to make a pass at her, and she rebuffs him. She presents him with photographs of her former lover and of herself when she was younger and prettier. She teases him by withholding a final photograph, which turns out to be a snapshot of the location where she lost her virginity. When the snapshot slips from her hand, Sloane moves to reach for it. As he does, Kath manages to entangle her body with his. She murmurs seductive endearments as the curtain falls.

Act 1 Analysis

Note: As is correct in British English, in this play "Mr" and other abbreviated forms of address are spelled without punctuation.

As with all of the plays Joe Orton wrote during his brief career, *Entertaining Mr Sloane* offers a darkly comic exposy of the chaos and passions that seethe beneath the seemingly ordinary, seemingly respectable veneer of everyday relationships. In this play, especially, his characters waste little time diving down below the niceties and formalities of social intercourse. These are people who do not mince their words. Within the first few minutes, for example, Mr Sloane has already asked the stranger who is showing him a room for rent whether she is married, and she has already answered that she is a widow (a lie) and the mother of a child who died young. Watching Kath and Sloane circling around inside the parlor is like watching two starved animals circling in a cage. What is it they hunger for?

What Kath hungers for, the audience quickly realizes, is human intimacy. She is an extremely lonely, desperate woman. Why else would she reveal to a perfect stranger that she bore a child out of wedlock? Before you know it, she is telling this stranger to call her his "mamma." But the "motherly kiss" she soon bestows on him is anything but maternal. When she remarks that her dead son, were he alive now, would be Sloane's age, her behavior comes across as almost incestuous. As for Sloane, it remains to be seen where his self-interest lies, but from the way he accepts Kath's flirtations, he gives the impression of an opportunist who will take anything and everything he can get.

When Kemp enters, he mistakes Sloane for his son, Ed. Although mistaken identity is the stuff of farce, and although Orton's later plays fall under that genre, *Entertaining Mr Sloane* is not really a true farce. It does, however, contain elements of farce, as it features a good deal of verbal wit (mostly from Ed). Also, it contains several improbable situations that are key to the narrative.

Just as Kath opens her private history to the young man, so does her father. Sloane's personal charisma seems to encourage intimate revelations from strangers. Kemp admits that there is a schism between himself and his son, Ed. He explains, obliquely, the reason for their rift. He walked in on his son having sex - "a felony" he calls it - with another boy when the boys were teenagers. Given the time and place of this admission, conservative England in the early 1960s, it would be natural for Sloane to react to this news with shock. Instead he replies: "That kind of thing happens often, I believe." Sloane's casual acceptance of homosexuality, somewhat unusual for the times, opens the door to questions about his own sexual history.

Suspicions about Sloane's questionable moral fiber arise when it seems that Kemp recognizes Sloane in connection with the murder of Kemp's father. The audience begins to realize that Sloane is the man who prostituted himself to Kemp's boss and then murdered him. Their altercation ends in violence, when Kemp stabs Sloane with a fork. The audience's fears about Sloane's background become close to certainty when we

discover that his hair is dyed, perhaps as a disguise. He seems to present himself as whatever the other person wants, playing on the needs of those around him.

Shamelessly, Kath throws herself at the handsome young man, managing to remove Sloane's pants at the same time confessing to wearing nothing under her dress. Kath does not act responsibly where her father is concerned, either. She is cruel and condescending to Kemp. She orders him about as though he were a naughty child and will not listen to him when he tries to identify Sloane.

When Ed enters the scene, he soon reveals himself as yet another self-serving, self-centered character. Like his sister, he is hungry for intimacy, and Sloane would feed that hunger quite nicely. Never does Ed directly express his desire for Sloane. He reveals it through innuendo and body language. Whether because of the socially repressive times in which he lives or for personal reasons, Ed is not open about his sexual orientation. His is a life of repression inside a closet that inevitably turns him cruel and hypocritical.

Kath's appeal to her father to speak to Ed underscores the basic modus operandi of the play's characters. Ed has promised to show his sister his elegant home, but only on the condition that she convince their father to stop ignoring him and speak to him. Ed will do his sister a favor, but only if she does him one. His needs and his interests always come first. For her part, Kath does not really care whether father and son are reunited. She only cares about her chance to escape her dismal world for awhile to gain access her brother's loftier realm. As for Kemp, he has no interest in helping his daughter find happiness. He is not willing to overlook what he considers his son's immorality. His concern is only for himself, as he speaks of his health and his future. Likewise, Sloane is only looking out for number one. In this dog-eat-dog household, satisfying one's own hunger is all that matters.

Although none of the characters is entirely likeable, it is hard not to feel some compassion for these damaged people. Kath lost her only child and was denied her true love by her brother. Ed yearns for the approval of a father who will never bestow it and lives his life within the confines of the closet. Kemp is an ailing old man who is dutiful to a daughter who degrades him and disdainful of a son who might love him. It remains to be seen whether Sloane will deserve our sympathy.

Act 2

Act 2 Summary

On a morning several months later, Kath enters the parlor to find Sloane lying on the sofa, taking a break from his work for Ed. Kath tries to encourage Sloane to return to his duties, but Sloane is none to eager to do so. Sloane seems to have the upper hand around the house these days, working whenever he feels like it. Kath reminds Sloane that Ed has the young man's best interests at heart, but this information does not inspire the young man to get up from the sofa and return to his duties.

Kath - now referring to herself frequently in the third-person as his "mamma" - questions Sloane about his activities the night before, when he came in late. She worries that he's running with a rough crowd. Sloane declares that the boys he runs with are "gentle" and "refined" young men. Kath grows even more alarmed when she hears about a girl who gave Sloane her phone number at a bar. Kath tries to convince Sloane that the girl is probably an immoral person, a gold-digger with a venereal disease. Sloane protests that Kath is too possessive and that she disgusts him not only because of her "filthy insinuations" but because she has begun to neglect her physical appearance. When he threatens to move out of the house, Kath apologizes, explaining that she only speaks out of concern for him. Sloane says she is becoming too possessive, to which Kath replies: "A mamma can't be possessive."

Kath and Sloane continue to wrangle about Sloane's friends as Kemp enters. The old man must rely now on a walking stick to get around. Sloane tries to help him locate his pills, but Kemp rebuffs him. Kath discusses the shopping excursion she's just returned from, which elicits some racist comments from Kemp about the presence of "foreigners" in the neighborhood.

When Sloane asks Kath what she brought him from the shops, she reveals, through pantomimes and suggestive phrases, that she is pregnant with his child. Kemp is oblivious to their conversation, and when the old man exits, Kath and Sloane discuss her pregnancy. Kath says she has been to the Register Office to inquire about a marriage license. Sloane makes it clear that he has no desire to marry her. Furthermore, he fears that her brother will fire him when he finds out about the baby. He says he knows someone who can provide an abortion.

Abortion is not an option that appeals to Kath. If he won't marry her, she asks him to at least give her something that will make her feel like they are married. She suggests that he make her a present of a locket in his possession, which belonged to his mother. Reluctantly, he parts with it, just as Ed enters the room.

Ed starts a conversation about his car, which he says is unexpectedly low on gasoline. When questioned about it, Sloane denies having used the car the previous nights,

though this contradicts his earlier conversation with Kath, in which he admitted using Ed's car for his own amusement. Ed appears to accept the lie as truth.

Kath announces that she is going to buy Sloane a present. Ed protests and tells Sloane to get back to work. Instead, Sloane, knowing his employer can't resist an intimate gesture from the young man, invites Ed to sit next to him on the sofa. Ed takes Sloane's hand and pronounces it an "honest" hand. He grows flustered so near the object of his desire and blurts out that he, too, has plans to buy Sloane a gift for his birthday.

After Sloane exits, Ed and Kath discuss Sloane's activities the previous night. Kath lies to protect Sloane, saying he stayed in and watched television. Ed, however, knows better. He also accuses his sister of distracting Sloane and keeping him from his duties. Ed threatens to fire Sloane, knowing it will upset his sister. She promises not to take him away from his work anymore. Ed says he will find another man for his sister, someone older and more mature. Kath protests, saying that Sloane appreciates her, that he calls her his "mamma" and that she loves him.

Ed is suspicious of Kath's involvement with Sloane. He accuses her of attempting to spoil things between himself and Sloane just as she did between Ed and his young mate, Tommy, years ago. According to Ed, his sister seduced his friend and made herself pregnant, thus ending the boys' relationship. Kath protests, saying Tommy loved her and would have married her if his parents had not disapproved. Ed denies this, saying that Tommy was the one who didn't want to marry her. Ed reveals that he burned a letter of Tommy's to Kath that she treasured, which contained his last words to Kath. Ed also admits that he burned her photograph of Tommy, telling her that it was for her own good because she had an unhealthy preoccupation with the past.

Ed tells his sister that she is "wicked." This is an opinion, based on her betrayal over Tommy, that he tends to announce regularly whenever the two meet. Kath, of course, denies it and weakly counters that she thinks her brother is the wicked one. Ignoring this, Ed removes some papers from his briefcase that he wants Kath to get their father to sign. These are, presumably, legal documents that will remove Kemp to a nursing home.

When Sloane returns, Ed and Kath fall into one of their frequent competitive games over the young man. Ed has addressed Sloane as "boy." Kath says she wants to be able to call Sloane "boy" as well. Ed refuses and angrily dismisses her.

After Kath is gone, Ed accuses Sloane of lying about borrowing the car. He says he knows Sloane took the vehicle out the night before. As usual, Sloane wriggles his way out of difficulties by heaping lies upon lies, which Ed is eager to believe. Sloane says the night out with his friends was an isolated event and that he'll never repeat it. He says his friends are respectable men with impeccable taste. Ed wonders whether any of them wear lipstick. Sloane denies this as Ed throws a tube of lipstick his way. He asks Sloane to explain it. Sloane makes up a story that the lipstick belongs to the wife of one of his pals. It slipped his mind that she was in the car.

Ed doesn't swallow the story. Like his sister before him, he warns Sloane against getting involved with women, who, Ed cautions him, will ruin his life. This warning includes his sister. He tells Sloane about how Kath destroyed his friendship with Tommy. He tells Sloane that Kath is a bad influence and a bad person all around - "a crafty tart." Ed then digresses, telling a story about being approached by a prostitute. Here as elsewhere he reveals himself to be a woman-hater who believes that all women are whores.

Ed says that he thinks it would be better if Sloane were to leave the house and go live with him. Sloane agrees to this but asks for a raise to reflect his new situation. Ed offers to give him a present instead. Sloane suggests that Ed buy him a car. Ed relents, promising to give him the car either this year or next.

Kemp enters, wanting to speak to his son alone. Sloane tries to hang around, but Ed dismisses the young man. Ed is overjoyed that his father is finally speaking to him. The old man tells Ed that Sloane visits him at night and frightens him. He shows his son a bandage (with the brand name Elastoplast) on his leg where Sloane kicked him. Kemp tells his son that Sloane visits Kath's bed at night, and that as a result she is now four months pregnant. The old man says that the reason why Sloane wants to harm him is that Kemp was a witness to the young man's crime. Ed says he doesn't want to hear about any alleged crime. In fact, Ed berates his father for spreading false stories about Sloane and tells his father that he should apologize to the young man.

Sloane enters and announces that someone is here to see Kemp. The old man knows that this is a merely Sloane's ruse to get him away from Ed, to keep Kemp telling Ed about the murder. Ed questions Sloane about his late-night visits to his father. Sloane admits that he does visit Kemp, but only now and then for a nice little chat. Ed asks Sloane if it's true that he kicks Kemp. Sloane admits that he does occasionally kick the old man, but he adds that Kemp "understands" why it happens.

When Ed asks about Kath's pregnancy, Sloane admits that it is true and that he got her pregnant. He protests, however, that Kath seduced him. Ed finds it hard to believe that Sloane is incapable of fending off Kath. Sloane replies, "You don't understand. It gathered momentum." Ed retorts, "You make her sound like a washing machine." This is one of several sarcastic one-liners about his sister that Ed delivers throughout the play.

Playing on Ed's sympathies, Sloane explains that his mistakes are the result of his improper upbringing and bad luck. Swayed as always by Sloane's smooth talk, Ed says he will give Sloane a second chance. He even takes Sloane's side against his father when the young man says that Kemp has so tormented him that he has considered leaving. Sloane says he'll try his best to make amends with Kemp and asks Ed to bring his father in so they can talk things over. Ed summons his father and exits.

Kemp is startled to find himself alone in the room with Sloane, who questions him about what he has told his son about Sloane's behavior. Kemp admits that he was going to tell Ed about the murder that Sloane committed. Sloane claims the death was accidental. He proceeds to give his version of the circumstances surrounding the death. According to Sloane, Kemp's boss picked him up at a cemetery and took him home, where he

proceeded to take nude photographs of Sloane. In the middle of the night, Sloane had second thoughts about such incriminating photographs and went into the photo studio to find the film and destroy it. Kemp's boss discovered Sloane in his studio, imagined he was being robbed and began shouting. Sloane lost his head and struck the man, who, Sloane says, must have had a bad heart, because the blow killed him. It wasn't really murder, Sloane says, since it was the man's poor health that caused his death.

The story, however, doesn't convince Kemp. He says that his boss was a healthy man with a healthy heart. Kemp calls Sloane a liar and says he plans to tell Ed the truth about the murder. He will also tell the police. Hearing this, Sloane begins to assault the old man, twisting his ear, knocking him to the floor and kicking him with his boot until Kemp is unconscious. Unable to rouse the old man, Sloane calls out to Ed. Instead, Kath appears. Sloane pushes her away and calls once again for Ed.

Act 2 Analysis

As the second act begins, Sloane appears to have the run of the house. He seems to have become what Kath wanted - a member of the family. Like the other members of this family, he does as he likes and cares little for what the others want or need. Sloane obviously has no interest in his duties for Ed, who is now his employer. Kath half-heartedly tries to convince him to return to his work, but it is clear that she prefers him to be nearby rather than off doing tasks for her brother.

Although Kath continues to refer to herself as his "mamma," her actions and language speak otherwise. She behaves more like a wife or a lover, a nagging, jealous one. Cross-examining Sloane about his late-night excursions, she exposes her desperate possessiveness, which only serves to alienate Sloane further. The more these characters try to impose their self-interests on one another, the more they are repelled as they collide with the selfish needs of the others.

Kemp's racist rant about the foreigners is in line with the homophobia he exhibits toward his son. It also suggests that his mean and narrow-minded nature may have stunted the healthy development of his children. Raised in this kind of us-versus-them atmosphere, it is little wonder that Kath and Ed distrust others and are motivated solely by their own desires.

Sloane fits in perfectly with the others in his "family." Being raised in an impoverished orphanage did not encourage any generosity of spirit. Kath and Ed themselves seem to have had no positive parental guidance. Nothing is known about their mother. Perhaps she has been long dead or even abandoned the family. Either way, a loving, maternal presence seems never to have existed in this household. The paternal influence seems to have been either tyrannical or entirely absent. Indeed, there is something grotesquely childish about all the characters. They are all like overgrown children who never matured beyond the need to gratify their infantile needs. Their reality is defined by and limited to the small world of their dreams and desires.

A case in point is the fact that Kath is now pregnant with Sloane's child. If Kath were a responsible woman, she would have taken precautions against becoming pregnant with the child of a man who is obviously not capable or at least not interested in assuming the responsibilities of a father. If Sloane had been a mature person, he at least would have taken precautions against pregnancy and, even better, would not have taken advantage of such a desperately lonely woman. Sloane assumes that he can wriggle out of this scrape as he has done many times before. An abortion is the simple solution to this problem, he thinks. Kath, however, wants to keep the child. She also wants to make the whole thing legitimate by getting married. She has even visited the office where they issue marriage licenses. That she thinks Sloane might marry her illustrates just how far from reality, at least from Sloane's reality, Kath operates.

Like Kath, Ed only sees what he wants to see. He knows that Sloane is lazy and dishonest, and yet he chooses to believe otherwise. At least, he is willing to look the other way, as he does in the matter of Sloane borrowing his car without his permission. Ed must also know that he cannot capture Sloane's heart, but he is desperate to win the young man's affections at any cost. He attempts to buy Sloane's devotion with the promise of gifts, higher salaries and a life of luxury.

Sloane's entrance into the house of Kemp and his family has thrown all of their dysfunctional behaviors into high relief. It has exposed the rupture between father and son. It has reopened wounds in both Ed and Kath's history. Most dramatically, however, Sloane's presence has revived the old and poisonous rivalry between brother and sister.

Kath and Ed's competition to win Sloane's affections is a painful reenactment of their earlier battle over Tommy, Ed's boyhood lover and the father of Kath's lost child. Once again brother and sister vie for the love of the same man. Once again Kath becomes impregnated by him. Each is determined to make a happier ending this time around. As the battle intensifies, Sloane begins to seem more and more a mere pawn in an old game, a trophy to win and display.

The difference this time around is Kemp's potential to affect the battle's outcome. He holds the power to ruin everyone's plans. Neither of his children, however, will listen to him. He tries to tell Ed about the crime Sloane has committed, but Ed refuses to hear it. Later, the audience will learn that Kemp has also tried to convince Kath of Sloane's crime, but she dismisses it as the ramblings of an old man. Both brother and sister have several times throughout the play discussed plans to get rid of their father by placing him in a nursing home. They both know Sloane has been violent to their father, but they both look away and allow Sloane to continue to terrorize him. Such neglect shows just how little either sibling cares for Kemp.

One could argue that Kemp is the only person in the play with a conscience. He wants to do what is morally and legally the right thing by turning Sloane over to the police for the murder of his boss. On the other hand, perhaps like all others, Kemp is merely acting in his own self-interests. It is possible that it is not his conscience at all but his feelings of jealousy that impel him. He resents the attention that his daughter shows Sloane. He fears that she will run off with Sloane and leave him alone. These are

reasons enough for Kemp to want to turn Sloane over to the authorities. In the end, however, none of this comes into play, because at the end of Act Two, Kemp becomes Sloane's second murder victim.

Act 3

Act 3 Summary

When Ed enters the room, he sees his father on the floor and kneels down beside him. Sloane blocks the doorway to keep Kath out, but she finally manages to get past him. Sloane explains that Kemp had an attack of some kind. Ed says he thinks their father will be fine, but he needs to get him upstairs to bed.

As soon as Ed leaves, Kath asks Sloane if he struck her father. He admits that he did. In fact, he says, he hit him several times. Kath refuses to believe it, saying he must be exaggerating. When Ed returns he reassures Kath that Kemp is all right. Leaving the room, she says wants to see her father, but Ed tells her not to disturb him because he's asleep. When the two men are alone, Ed tells Sloane that Kemp is dead. Sloane says his death must have been the result of his weak heart. Ed says that it was murder.

When Kath returns, she is preoccupied with her housework and preparing dinner. Sloane is not interested in food. He's feeling ill. Ed explains to Kath that something has happened that requires Sloane to go away. Kath asks if Sloane is in trouble, and when Ed answers in the affirmative, Kath replies that she is sure it was an accident. Ed thinks she means their father's death just minutes ago. Instead, she's referring to the death of Kemp's boss. Apparently, her father told her about Sloane killing his boss, but she chose not to believe it.

After Kath leaves the room, Sloane begins to pack his suitcase. He plans to go off with Ed. That's impossible, Ed says, because a murder has been committed, and Sloane will have to deal with the law and accept responsibility for his actions. Sloane tries to convince Ed to concoct a story to protect him. He wants Ed to tell the authorities that Kemp fell down the stairs and that the fall killed him. Ed refuses to go along with this plan because it lacks all decent principles. Sloane says that Ed has no principles, and this angers Ed further.

To placate Ed, Sloane once again resorts to exploiting Ed's sexual attraction to the young man. He touches Ed. He tells him a story about a man, similar to Ed, whom he met a couple of years before. Like Ed, the man was attracted to other men. Sloane says that the man offered him a job if he agreed to become his lover, conveying his meaning in veiled terms. Sloane says he refused the offer but later regretted it. If Ed were to offer him the same opportunity now, however, Sloane swears he would oblige. The promise of a sexual relationship with Sloane quickly changes Ed's mind about turning the young man over the police.

Kath is heard screaming in another part of the house. When she enters the room, she announces that their father is dead. Ed says he knew that already, but he didn't tell her because he didn't want to upset her. She can't understand how her father died. She

says she thought he was in good health. Ed tries to convince her otherwise. He says that their father's complaints were real and that he was truly sick.

Ed tells Sloane to bring the car around so that they can fetch the doctor. He then asks Kath what she'll say to the authorities about the cuts on Kemp's face. Kath says she will tell them that their father was rude to Sloane, who hit him in exasperation. Ed tells her that would be a bad idea. The police might misinterpret Sloane's actions and suspect him of killing Kemp. They might hang Sloane for murder. Ed asks Kath if she ever polishes the stairs. No, she answers, because their father could have slipped on them and hurt himself. Ed asks her to go polish them now so that it will appear as though Kemp's death was the result of falling down the slippery stairs. Kath seems to get into the spirit of the cover-up by adding that she might put Kemp's new shoes on him now. Because he wore them only one time, their soles are smooth. This will add another measure of credibility to his accident. Ed praises her for her ingenuity.

When Sloane enters, Kath notices his suitcase and wonders where he is going. Ed explains that Sloane needs to disappear for a while until the trouble blows over. This upsets Kath. Sloane reassures her that he will return. Kath, apparently jealous that her brother will now have Sloane to himself, announces her pregnancy to Ed and asks him if he isn't angry with Sloane. Her brother replies that he is angry with her instead, for seducing the young man.

Brother and sister squabble, their rivalry for Sloane's affections growing more heated. Ed accuses her of immoral behavior. Kath defends herself and declares that Sloane truly cares for her. Ed says that Sloane has gone soft under her influence. Kath asks Sloane why he must leave. She asks if it is something she did or if it is because she is pregnant. Sloane says he is leaving to start a new and better life.

Kath bemoans the loss of her reputation. Sloane says that she lost her reputation long ago. Kath blames her brother for instilling in him that belief. This instigates a fresh battle in the old war about how Kath ruined Ed's friend Tommy and the relationship the two boys shared. As usual, Kath asserts that Tommy loved her and wanted to marry her. Ed cruelly mocks her appearance and tells her she holds no attractions for any man, including Sloane. Kath asks Sloane if this is true, and Sloane assents. She accuses Sloane of deceiving her.

Sloane remarks that he assumes Kath will support Ed's "story." Kath plays dumb, asking what the story is. Sloane answers that the story is that Kemp fell down the stairs. Kath says that she will allow no one to persuade her to perjure herself. Sloane is dumbfounded by her sudden change of heart. Just a few minutes ago it seemed she would go along with the story. Sloane begins to panic. He is not the only one worried. Ed, too, is distressed by her sudden shift. To bolster her position, Kath reveals that Kemp told her about Sloane's crime. Now she knows of two murders he committed. She dangles her power over him, asking him once more not to leave but to stay with her. Sloane refuses. Then, she puts her position bluntly:

"KATH. I was never subtle, Mr Sloane ... If you go with Eddie, I'll tell the police.

"SLOANE. If I stay here he'll do the same.

"ED. It's what is called a dilemma, boy. You are on the horns of it."

Whether Sloane's position is a "dilemma" or "blackmail" is not debated, but it is obviously one and the same. Suddenly aware that his future is no longer his own, Sloane turns violent, like a cornered animal. He slaps Kath, shoving Ed away when he tries to protect his sister. Sloane shakes her, and she screams. Sloane has broken her false teeth and knocked them out of her mouth. Kath crawls along the floor looking for them. Meanwhile, Ed, once again displaying his gift for sarcasm, mocks Sloane for his lack of "courtesy."

Sloane's desperation continues to mount. He appeals to Ed to help him persuade Kath to give up her position no matter what it takes, even if that means cutting her throat. Ed balks, saying he will not take orders. "Perhaps we can share you," he concludes. Sloane chooses to ignore this solution, but a few moments later Ed returns to it. "An arrangement to suit all tastes. That is what's needed."

Kath offers that what she needs is to keep her baby. Ed agrees. Kath wants to be married to Sloane, but Ed points out that a wife cannot testify against her husband, which would nullify her power over Sloane. Kath relinquishes her wish to marry Sloane on the condition that he doesn't leave her. Ed agrees to this and then dismisses Sloane so that he can chat privately with his sister.

Alone, brother and sister collaborate over their story for the authorities. Now that she has gotten what she wants, Kath agrees to go along with the lie that their father fell down the stairs. Her one condition is that Sloane doesn't leave her. Her brother then suggests a compromise. Since Kath has had Sloane for six months, it's only fair that Ed have him for the next six months. It will be a "partnership," Ed says, in which from now on, each will keep Sloane for half a year, with visitations to the other allowable. Kath agrees, congratulating her brother for his cleverness. As part of the sharing of the "property," Ed asks Kath to give him the locket that Sloane gave her. She will receive it back when his six months with Sloane are up.

Before Ed exits a final time, he pronounces that the morning has been a "pleasant" one. Kath, alone now on the sofa, sweetens her solitude by enjoying a piece of candy as the curtain falls.

Act 3 Analysis

The beginning of Act Three demonstrates how completely these characters can evade reality. Ed pretends that his dead father is not dead and takes him upstairs for a "rest." This is followed by Kath's refusal to believe that Sloane has just repeatedly struck her father, despite the fact that Sloane himself admits it. Kath, who chatters on at length about housework, heightens the surreal atmosphere by discussing what she plans to cook for dinner, while her father lies upstairs murdered.

When Sloane professes to feel ill, it signals a change in the direction of the play. Something is up if the usually fearless escape artist Sloane is frightened. He begins packing his suitcase to leave with Ed, as they discussed earlier, but now Ed changes his tune. Sloane must stay and face the consequences of his actions, Ed says. Since Ed would never lose Sloane willingly, it is clear that Ed has something up his sleeve. He talks of "principles" and acting according to the law, but Ed lives outside the law, being gay in a time when homosexual acts were punishable by imprisonment. Ed does not care about abiding by the law. He cares about fulfilling his needs, and that means possessing Sloane at any cost.

Backed into a corner, Sloane resorts to his usual defensive weapon, his sex appeal. In so many words, he promises to submit to Ed completely, including sexually. This promise appears to change Ed's mind, although it becomes evident later that Ed never intended to turn Sloane in anyway. Ed knows that he can use the threat of informing the police to control Sloane from now on. Kath is slower to come to the realization of her new power over Sloane. On the other hand, perhaps she is playing dumb. With Kath, it is sometimes hard to tell.

When Kath notices that Sloane is packing his suitcase to go off with Ed, the long, bitter rivalry between brother and sister broils anew. They exchange insults and parade their old scars over Tommy. Suddenly, however, in the midst of these recriminations, comes the turning point in this psychological chess game. It becomes clear that the king and queen have snared the pawn and that his fate is no longer in his own hands, but in theirs, jointly.

Kath now refuses to go along with the story about their father falling down the stairs. She won't budge from her position. In response, Sloane turns to his other trusty weapon - violence. Sloane's panic is palpable. Ed is also afraid. His fear is that he will lose Sloane after all. They never expected Kath could be such a formidable foe. Now, she is as powerful as her brother is. She knows as much as he does about Sloane's crime, and she is determined to exploit her power. Sloane's appeal to Ed to kill his own sister, while disturbing, is more pathetic than sinister. It is the last resort of a desperate man. Ed knows he does not need to commit a crime to retain his power over Sloane.

The man who once ruled over Kath and Ed both is now their prisoner. There is nothing Sloane can do about it, and he knows it. All that is left is for brother and sister to decide how to share the spoils. An equitable 50-50 split is quickly reached that satisfies both parties.

Not only have Kath and Ed ensured a happy future for themselves with their Sloane-sharing plan, but they have also resolved the bitter issue that has divided them all these years. The battle and the ensuing regrets and recriminations over Tommy can finally be laid to rest. Through Sloane, a perfect stand-in for Tommy in both their lives, they can bury the hatchet by sharing him equally.

The final curtain brings a happy ending for Kath and Ed in many ways. Finally, they both get the man of their dreams. They have ended their bitter feud. They are also now free

of the burden of their father. Sloane is the unwitting instrument of their happiness and freedom.

Although the ending seems odd, with a murderer bringing happiness to these confused characters, this type of event is not unusual in a play written in the heyday of the so-called Theater of the Absurd. *Entertaining Mr Sloane* shares several key characteristics of the Theater of the Absurd, which borrowed from existentialism the theme of the hopelessness and pointlessness of man's existence. In the "absurd" plays of Samuel Beckett, Eugine Ionesco and Orton's contemporary Harold Pinter, there is always a pervading sense of futility and of menace, somewhat relieved by an undercurrent of black humor. Settings are usually simple. All the action may take place in a single location such as a room, which is the case with *Entertaining Mr Sloane*.

Theater of the Absurd plays were also intended to disturb or unsettle their audiences, to jolt them out of their post-war complacency. This was accomplished by exploring themes that make people uncomfortable - murder, incest and other taboo topics. Absurdist playwrights also removed many of the usual structures of traditional theater that audiences expected. Plot was minimal or nonexistent, conversations often went nowhere and the language could seem nonsensical, a jumble of jargon, clichys and slang. Cause and effect, such as consequences for one's actions, were not always in play.

Perhaps that is the case with Mr Sloane. Perhpas his imprisonment to Ed and Kath is punishment enough for his crimes, or maybe he has gotten off easy. There is still a question of whether Ed and Kath will manage to keep their wild animal chained. These are some of the enticing questions that Joe Orton leaves his audience to ponder.

Characters

Dadda

See Kemp

Ed

Ed vies with his sister Kath to be Sloane's sexual partner and ends up sharing him with her. Mean-spirited, self-centered, pompous, and domineering, Ed is the son of the aging Kemp and part of the mysterious "business" that employs Sloane as a chauffeur after Ed becomes sexually attracted to him. As a young man Ed was very active in sports, which his father admired, but a rift occurred one day between Ed and his father shortly after Ed's seventeenth birthday, when Kemp discovered Ed doing something unmentionable in his bedroom

Now barely on speaking terms with his father, Ed arrives in the first act to procure Kemp's signature, presumably on papers that would commit his father to the kind of old-age home in which Orton's own father, William Orton, was eventually placed. When Kemp is accidentally killed by Sloane at the end of Act II, Ed shows no remorse for the death of his father and throughout Act III seems only interested in preserving his sexual partnership with Sloane. Of all the characters, Ed asserts the most hypocritical concern for high moral values.

Eddie

See Ed

Kath

Kath competes with her brother Ed for Sloane's sexual favors. A frumpy, middle-aged woman with a raging sexual appetite, she lures Sloane into her home as a prospective lodger and then seduces him, as she apparently had seduced at least one man (Ed's "mate" Tommy) before. Kath then becomes pregnant by Sloane, just as she did by Tommy. Starved for affection, randy but determined to put on a coy demeanor, Kath refuses to see herself as she really is, pretending to be young, innocent, and respectable. In the case of Kemp's death, she comically and pathetically denies the reality of her father's condition as long as she possibly can. Superficially comical, Kath is perhaps, deep down, quite as cruel, vicious, and heartless as her brother. Orton's biographer, John Lahr, explained that Kath is ironically modeled on Orton's mother, Elsie, who professed an abhorrence of human sexuality and was herself, like Kath, the possessor of a complete set of false teeth.

Kemp

Kemp is the elderly father of Kath and Ed, the pathetic occupant, with Kath, of the household that Sloane joins. Hard of hearing and weak of eyesight, Kemp recognizes Sloane as the murderer of his former boss-a photographer who picked up the hitchhiking Sloane, photographed him, and then took Sloane for a burglar as Sloane got up in the night to destroy the incriminating photos. For the last twenty years Kemp has not been on consistent speaking terms with his son, Ed, but he breaks his silence in an attempt to accuse Sloane as a murderer and the culprit in Kath's pregnancy.

Stubborn and ignorant of his own vulnerability, Kemp challenges Sloane at the end of Act II, refuses to accept Sloane's appeal for silence, and dies after Sloane beats him. Kemp is probably the most "decent" character in the play and its only genuine victim. He is modeled after Orton's own father, who also was almost blind and referred to as "Dadda."

Sloane

Sloane is the sexually opportunistic, lower middle-class young man who comes to the home of Kath and her father as a lodger, accidentally kills Kemp at the end of Act II, and ends up as an alternating sexual partner to the blackmailing brother and sister duo of Ed and Kath, living with one for six months and then the other for the next six months. A handsome, amoral, self-serving, aggressive, and potentially violent young man. without much education but with considerable street smarts, Sloane is capable of turning nearly any situation to his own advantage. He either achieves his greatest victory at the end of the play or suffers his ultimate defeat, depending on how one interprets the play's last scene. As Lahr reported in *Prick up Your Ears,* Orton "saw himself as the physical prototype for Sloane," the most notable clue being the careful attribution to Sloane of the "delicate skin" that Orton was so vainly proud of in himself.

Themes

Sex

Orton's most obvious subject in *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* is sexual appetite. with the exception of the aged Kemp, the characters are so preoccupied with their sexual needs that by the end of the play they appear completely self-centered, frighteningly insensitive, and almost subhuman.

Kath is the one most openly hunting for sexual satisfaction. Having met Sloane that afternoon in the library, she invites him to consider her home as an alternative to his present lodgings. When Sloane says in his fourth speech of the play, "I can't give you a decision right away," Kath says "I'd be happy to have you." The sexual pun on "have" is obvious, and Sloane gets the message. After a brief silence he says "are you married?" and the question is equivalent to "are you sexually available?" This is the fictional counterpart of the real-life "pickups" that Orton describes so explicitly in his writings in *The Orton Diaries.* In the pre-AIDS homosexual world, Orton was outrageously promiscuous to the point of obsession, and in the characters of *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* he portrayed a similar kind of sexual obsession.

Ed is the most circumspect in his expression of sexual needs, but the onset of his sexual interest in Sloane is as rapid as Kath's. When he first meets Sloane, Ed is intending to dismiss the prospective lodger from his sister and father's house, but Ed only gets the word "I" out of his mouth before he begins to assess Sloane as a potential sexual partner. Sloane reads the signals immediately and is "Smiling" as Ed's conversation probes for information about Sloane's availability as a sexual partner.

Sloane, of course, is initially the sexual predator, par excellence, as he is willing to serve either sex and by Act II is out cruising for additional women But with the death of Kemp, Ed and Kath surpass Sloane in darkly cornic obsessive ness, for they show no concern for the passing of their father and immediately use the event to further their sexual claims on Sloane. As the third act unfolds, Ed and Kath have completely forgotten their newly deceased father and are jockeying for sexual supremacy with Sloane. As the play ends, the predatory Sloane becomes a thoroughly "kept" man, and Kath and Ed are comically reduced to a parody of sexual appetite: Ed callously ends the play with the incredibly incongruous line, "Well, it's been a pleasant morning" and Kath settles on the sofa eating a piece of candy.

Appearance and Reality

If the intensity of these characters' sex drives makes them funny. what makes them even funnier is their attempt to hide their obsessions. While Kath is seducing Sloane, she generally pretends to be coy or describes her affections as "motherly." When Sloane responds aggressively to her sexual hints. Kath pretends to be outraged ("Mr.

Sloane-don't betray your trust") while soon giving him all the "go ahead" signals he might need: "I must be careful of you. Have me naked on the floor if I give you a chance. If my brother was to know. . . . Would you like to go to bed?" Perhaps the most deftly comic treatment of Kath's hypocrisy occurs at the end of Act I when Kath greets Sloane in a transparent neglige and tells him "I'm just at a quiet bit of knitting before I go to bed."' She then realizes that she has only one knitting needle and must search in the junk of the living room to find its mate.

Ed's approach to masking his sexual rapacity is more subtle. After he's decided in his first interview with Sloane that he wants the young man as a sexual partner, Ed offers Sloane gifts to appeal to Sloane's mercenary interests. Whereas Kath tries to entice Sloane with the promise of sexual availability and motherly shelter, Ed is simply willing to buy Sloane's body, but like Kath, Ed wants to appear shocked when the conversation and action gets too explicit. Near the end of the first interview, Ed fantasizes about Sloane's undergarments-"do you wear leather. . . next to the skin? Leather jeans, say? Without. . . aah" and when Sloane gets explicit, finishing Ed's incomplete sentence with the fantasy Ed had in mind-"pants?"-Ed retreats into his pose-"Get away! (pause) The question is are you clean living? You may as well know I set great store by morals. Too much of this casual bunking up nowadays. "

Sloane is more honest in his sexual behavior, but he also pursues his sexual interests with hypocrisy-most clearly when he's at a disadvantage and must pretend to be repentant in order to maintain ills easy life. This happens first in the second act when Ed discovers that Sloane has used Ed's car to romance the hostess at one of the nighteries he's visited. Once caught, Sloane says "would you accept an unconditional apology. . . . It won't happen again.. . I respect you" The humor of this comes from the audience's realization that Sloane respects no one and will always be an inveterate philanderer. Perhaps the only thing funnier is that Ed chooses to believe Sloane, against all evidence, because Ed's sexual need is so great.

In his initial interrogation of Sloane, Ed apologizes for Kath's behavior and when Sloane says, "she seems all right," Ed says, "you can't always go on appearances." Ed's rejoinder could be taken as Orton's abiding comic concern: what "appears to be" is usually a pose to hide one's real feelings - feelings which are usually dominated by sexual drives, self-interest, and the desire for power.

Morals and Morality

A more conventional playwright might turn this attempt to hide sexual obsession into a moral stance, permitting or even leading the audience to make judgments about the destructiveness and folly of this behavior. But Orton's thematic approach seems to be to attack conventionality itself, and while he revels in the comic hypocrisy of his characters he doesn't mean to suggest that their behavior ought to be "normal." For Orton, the obsession with normality is far worse than the obsession with sex, which he seems to find fairly innocuous. In fact, the obsession with normality not only causes the hypocrisy

but perhaps also adds to the intensity of the rapacious sexual behavior as characters respond to the repression of their instinctive sexual needs.

As a victim in his personal life of conventional moral judgments about homosexuality, Orton seems to suggest that conventional notions of morality ought to be challenged in order to encourage fresh thinking and to break the complacent certainty of the middle class as to what is right and wrong. The most effective way to force this thought process on his audience is to present them with outrageous behavior, entice them to laugh at it, and then refuse to give the audience the satisfaction of a moralistic ending that would reinforce the status quo of conventional morality. At the end of *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* Kemp's death will go unexamined by the police, as will Sloane's earlier killing, and the sexual triangle that has been established might continue to satisfy the sexual needs of these characters indefinitely.

Style

This strange, Ortonesque sense of humor is generally referred to as "black humor," the kind that attempts to shock the audience into laughing at what is essentially grotesque and horrifying This dark humor receives its full expression in Act III when Kath, Ed, and Sloane respond to Kemp's death with varying forms of apathy, self-interest, and uncivilized human behavior.

Act III begins with Kath, Ed, and Sloane huddling over Kemp's body and Kath saying "somebody fetch his tablets." However, in response to tills request "nobody moves" and the stage picture immediately communicates both laughter and these characters' self-interest and lack of compassion. Ed soon exits with Kemp, and when Ed returns (fairly quickly) he reports that Kemp is dead (did Ed finish him off?). Ed's only concern now is how he can use the incident to gain control over Sloane. Though Kath may subconsciously suspect that Kemp is dead, she carries on as if her father is merely ill. She is darkly funny because her activities are so disconnected from her very recent concern for her father: she now does housecleaning, worries about Kemp gelling toffee stuck in his teeth, and hums "The Indian Love Call."

The distressed Sloane is a figure of dark comic fun as the tables are turned on him and he frets about the possibilities of facing the law, but the grim humor really heats up when Sloane figures out how to extricate himself. Sloane tantalizes Ed by playing the role of penitent and subservient sexual slave sitting beside Ed, Sloane lays a hand on Ed's knee and simply says "I accept responsibility." Reassured in his power and control, Ed says, "Good. Remove that hand, will you?," and the laughter comes from seeing Ed resume his pretense of strict morality while his father lies dead upstairs The mutual posing-Ed as a wounded man of high moral fiber, Sloane as a genuine penitent-then leads to naughty double *entendre* that shocks the laughing audience into accepting both the characters' obsession with sexual pleasure and their indifference to the fresh corpse. "I'd wear my Jeans out in your service. Cook for you" says Sloane, and Ed responds "I eat out." Just before Kath enters screaming, having discovered Kemp's body, Ed and Sloane are talking in sexual code-"only women drink tea in bed" says Ed and Sloane rejoinders, "you bring me my tea in bed, then. Any arrangement you fancy."

Kath puts a final touch on this dark laughter when she reveals her insensitivity to the death of her father. Initially, she appears genuinely concerned that her father has died, but the audience is shocked into laughter with lines from her such as, "will I have to send his pension book in?" and "I shall never get in my black [dress]. I've put on weight Since we buried mamma." Her self-interest, along with Ed's and Sloane's, is summed up perfectly by Ed's strangely comic line, "I would never suggest deceiving the authorities under normal circumstances. But we have ourselves to think of." Kath's specific brand of self-interest is funny because in this final scene she is so changeable. She agrees to make Kemp's death seem like an accidental fall down newly polished stairs, reneges when she is rejected by Sloane, and then resumes the he when Ed's plan for sharing Sloane makes the he convenient again it is moral flexibility like this that

gives rich humor to lies like Kath's "respect the truth always. It's the least you can do under the circumstances."

Perhaps the most difficult laughter to assimilate in the final scene is Ed and Sloane's cruelty toward Kath. Ed forces Kath to face the reality of her middle-aged figure, dragging her in front of the mirror. When he says "you've nothing to lure any man," she asks pathetically, "is that the truth, Mr. Sloane?" and Sloane casually answers, "more or less." The audience is forced to laugh at both Sloane's unexpected bluntness and Kath's comeuppance. At the same time the audience feels sympathy for her, and in the background is always the reminder of her insensitivity to her father's death. It is tills kind of multi-layered complexity of humor that gained Orton his stature as a significant figure in twentieth-century drama.

Historical Context

The Decriminalization of Homosexuality in England

The mid-to late-1960s are often thought of as an era of sexual permissiveness (a concept often labeled "free love "). During this time, many young people questioned what society had labeled sexually taboo. At times they openly flouted sexual convention in an attempt to force society to reevaluate and loosen established mores. Events often called "love-ins" encouraged casual sex with multiple partners. Many others resisted the free love movement and vocally criticized the permissiveness as evidence of a decline in moral standards In *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* Orton gleefully challenges the status quo. His three main characters openly pursue heterosexual, bisexual, and homosexual satisfaction without being subjected to any moralistic judgment (at least within the fictional realm of the play).

The most inflammatory sexual pursuit of Orton's characters was the implied homosexual activity between Eddie and Sloane. Homosexuality had a long history of social and legal condemnation in England and the Implicit sexual relationship between Sloane and Eddie as well as the real-life relationship between Orton and Kenneth Halliwell were still punishable offenses when *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* appeared in London in 1964. By Orton's death in 1967, however, British legislation responded to continued appeals for tolerance by decriminalizing homosexuality in private life, opening the door to even more permissive attitudes in subsequent decades.

The social and legal hostility toward homosexuality goes back at least as far as England's King Henry VIII, who Initiated legislation enacted by Parliament in 1533 that made homosexual acts punishable by death In 1861life imprisonment was substituted for the death penalty and in 1885 the Criminal Law Amendment Act reduced the maximum penalty to two years with hard labor for homosexual acts that did not involve anal intercourse. It was under this legislation in 1895 that the famous British playwright Oscar Wilde was convicted and sentenced to prison for his affair with Lord Alfred Douglas. It was this same criminal code under which Orton was living and writing in the mid 1960s.

The turning point in the decriminalization of homosexuality began in 1954 when a government appointed group called the Wolfenden Committee began research that would lead to a report in 1957 recommending in part that homosexual acts between consenting adults in private no longer be considered a criminal offense. Parliament initially rejected the recommendations involving homosexuality, and it took another decade for public sentiment to insist on the legal relief embodied in the Sexual Offenses Act of 1967. And even this law still included significant restrictions and exclusions. As a minor under the age of 21, Mr Sloane's sexual activities in the play would still have made him and Eddie liable to prosecution, though in 1967 the sexual practices of Orton and Halliwell, as consenting adults in private, would have finally become safe from prosecution.

This liberalization, of course, was only the beginning of social and legislative reform As Jeffrey Weeks points out in *Sex, Politics, and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality Since 1800,* by 1965 the percentage of those favoring homosexual law reform in Britain had Jumped from a figure of only 25% in 1957 to 63% Of that number who favored reform, however, 93% remained convinced that homosexuality was "a form of Illness requiring medical treatment." The Gay Rights Movement initiated in the United States in the late 1960s continued to question the old concept of sexual "normalcy," and even the AIDS crisis (a situation that many conservative and religious leaders proclaimed as a divine judgment that homosexuality was wrong) could not extinguish the increasing momentum for homosexual rights. In part through works such as Orton's, an openness toward sexuality helped foster growing acceptance of the homosexual orientation Orton's success in introducing homosexual themes in his drama paved the way for similar portrayals in subsequent films *(Priscilla, Queen of the Desert),* television shows *(Ellen),* and nearly all other forms of popular culture.

Beatlemania

In early 1963, the Beatles were one of several bands performing in small nightclubs in their hometown of Liverpool, England, but by December of 1963 their first megabit, "I Want to Hold Your Hand" turned them into an international phenomenon. In 1964, the year that *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* debuted, the Beatles began their domination of the world's pop scene with their first trip to America for a tour and a landmark appearance on the *Ed Sullivan Show.* At these concerts, the predominantly teenage audiences erupted in hysterical screaming that all but drowned out the music Reminiscent of the adulation showered in earlier generations on figures like actor Rudolph Valentino, singer Frank Sinatra, and performer Elvis Presley, this hysteria was of some concern to those who thought the response indicated a serious breakdown in cultural values. Since the hysteria took its strongest form in women and teenage girls, many commentators saw the adulation as an unusually public expression of sexual longing. Others saw the enthusiasm as a distressing substitute for spiritual values, a concern that was exacerbated some years later when John Lennon casually suggested that the Beatles had become more popular than Jesus Christ. Still others interpreted the whole phenomenon as a dismissal of convention, established authority, and the status quo-a charge that was reinforced by the Beatles' unconventional clothes and androgynously long hair.

As the Beatles' popularity grew, they became known not only for their own music, which had become ambitious and adventurous in ways never imagined on the pop landscape, but as lightning rods for other areas of pop culture with their considerable stature, the group made millions of people aware of obscure artists such as Peter Max, musicians like Ravi Shankar, and independent filmmakers such as Richard Lester (who directed the group's film debut, *A Hard Day's Night* and its follow-up *Help').* More than any band before them, the Beatles became a pop culture entity whose compliments and endorsements could bring fame and fortune to the artist upon whom they were bestowed.

Orton's role as a champion of the unconventional soon brought him into contact with these famous musicians from Liverpool; it was no wonder that they should think of the Iconoclastic author of *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* and *Loot* as the possible creator of their next film. In a personal interview described in Orton's diaries and quoted in Lahr's biography of Orton, a meeting between Orton and Paul McCartney revealed that McCartney, a rare theatre goer, had found *Loot'* 'the only play he hadn't wanted to leave before the end." Commissioned in 1967 to write the screenplay for the follow-up to *Help',* Orton came up with *Up against it.* The script was laced with cross dressing, murder, adultery, and imprisonment. The Beatles, however, eventually rejected this script as too unconventional even for their Iconoclastic and controversial image. In 1991, musician Todd Rundren (who, with his band Utopia, once released an album of intentionally Beatlesque songs titled "Deface the Music") would resurrect *Up against it* as a stage musical, the results of which he released as an album titled *Second Wind.*

Critical Overview

Entertaining Mr. Sloane has generally been overshadowed by what are now considered Orton's more mature and more clearly "farcical" plays, *Loot* and *What the Butler Saw.* However, when Orton's first full-length play premiered, eminent British playwright Terence Rattigan called it (in a letter to Orton quoted by Lahr) "the most exciting and stimulating first play. . . that I've seen in thirty (odd) years' play-going." And while reviewing the 1981 Off-Broadway revival of the play, *New Yorker* theatre critic Edith Oliver, while admitting the superiority of Orton's later efforts, exclaimed, "but what a debut!"

As with all of Orton's purposefully shocking plays, *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* aroused violently mixed reactions in its initial production. Some reviews referred to him as a bright new figure in the theatre world while others blanched at the play's amorality, noting that the play's hOmiC1de (Kemp's death) was unaccompanied by any moral judgment. Still others, like the anonymous Critic for the London *Times,* tried to ride the fence, saying "the coarseness is sometimes offensive but it is characteristic of the offensive people who use it; it is theatrically valid." As Lahr pointed out in *Prick up Your Ears,* Orton "enjoyed the hostility as much as the praise, bad reviews featuring [in his scrapbook] as prominently as raves." The most negative review for the initial production at the New Arts Theatre came from one W. A. Darlington, in the conservative *Daily Telegraph,* who asserted that "not for a long time have I disliked a play so much as I disliked Joe Orton's *Entertaining Mr. Sloane.* I feel as if snakes had been writhing round my feet." As Lahr reported, Orton responded to this vitriol by writing hIs own mock condemnation of the play for the "Letters to the Editor" section of *The Daily Telegraph,* assuming the pseudonym of Mrs. Edna Welthorpe and declaring that she was "nauseated by this endless parade of mental and physical perversion." As the war of opinions raged, Rattigan saw in Orton's first play the style of William Congreve *(Love for Love)* and Oscar Wilde *(The Importance of Being Earnest)* Rattigan put up half the money for a transfer from the production's small, fringe venue at the New Arts to the Wyndham Theatre in the fashionable West End. There, Darlington reviewed the playa second tune and found the characters still "shameless and repulsive in the extreme" but grudgingly admitted that his interest was this tune "held throughout" (as quoted by Lahr).

Though the play continued to be very controversial during its run at the Wyndham, this major West-End production made Orton an overnight sensation. His play was soon slated for publication as the best new play of the year, and Orton was frequently labeled the year's most promising playwright. As Lahr summarized in his biography, "Orton, who had been surviving on three pounds a week until his first royalty check, found his weekly earnings to be as much as 239 pounds. The play was sold to Pans in August, and the next year to Spain, the United States, Israel, and Australia. It would be made into a film and a television play Orton had arrived in the style of his comedy-with a vengeance." As Lahr further pointed out, Orton "relished the scandal" that *Entertaining Mr Sloane* had provoked because it "proved the comic truth of his play. that the culture hid its violence behind a show of propriety."

The first American production of *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* opened on Broadway in October of 1965, attracting large preview audiences and the approval of established playwrights such as Edward Albee *(Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?),* Tennessee Williams *(Cat on a Hot Tin Roof),* and Peter Shaffer *(Equus).* The reviews for the American debut, however, were largely negative. Norman Nadel for the *World Telegram and Sun* said the play had "the Sprightly charm of a medieval English cesspool,"_ while John McClain of the New York *Journal American* suggested (as quoted by Lahr) that "if this is [England's] best play of any year they are in serious trouble." Howard Taubman of the *New York Times* called it "a singularly unattractive play." The production closed after thirteen performances. But the outraged Taubman continued his indictment of the play even after it closed, writing an essay in the Sunday *New York Times* that labeled *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* "nihilistic" and (in a blatant self-contradiction) "too insignificant to merit further belaboring." This prompted a response in the same paper a week later from Orton's director, Alan Schneider, who expressed confidence in the play's "ultimate vitality and durability in the history of contemporary drama."

The American vindication of *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* came in 1981 when an Off-Broadway revival succeeded where its Broadway production had failed *New York Times* reviewer Mel Gussow called the revival a "blissfully perverse comedy of bad manners," concluding that "today, posthumously, Orton's reputation is secure." Edith Oliver wrote in the *New Yorker* that this "first of Joe Orton's high comedies of lowlife" was "a minor Classic." Referring to its 1965 Broadway flop, she added, "one wonders how so many people in New York could have failed to recognize its quality at once." And Robert Asahina, writing for the *Hudson Review* concluded that" *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* is still an insightful commentary on the sexual and social role confusion that is considerably more widespread now than when it was written."

Orton's first produced play has survived all of its controversial productions and continues to be revived in theatres around the world. Clearly less farcical than *Loot* and *What the Butler Saw, Entertaining Mr. Sloane* is now considered less typical of his style than Orton's last two major plays but still "Ortonesque" in its provocative content and style.

Criticism

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

Critical Essay #1

Nienhuis is a Ph D. specializing in modem and contemporary drama. In this essay he discusses the moral dimensions of comedy and their relevance to Orton's first full-length play, Entertaining Mr. Sloane.

The rebellious and comical style that Joe Orton is most famous (or infamous) for does not surface in its complete form until his last two major plays, *Loot* and *What the Butler Saw.* His first major play, *Entertaining Mr. Sloane,* however, ultimately embodies enough of the qualities noticed by his Critics and seen throughout his works to illustrate the central artistic Issue in Orton's drama. Is Orton a master satirist and farceur, a ground-breaking comic genius, or a disenchanted man-child metaphorically throwing rocks at the establishment?

Known now mainly for his wildly extravagant farce, Orton's absurd tendencies do not get liberated in *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* until Act III, most notably when-in the struggle with Sloane-Kath's false teeth fall out of her mouth and roll under the sofa. Up until this point in the play, Orton's comic skill is manifested mainly in bizarre situations and strikingly incongruous dialogue. Until the end of Act II, Orton's comedy is fairly conventional in the sense that it follows the fairly standard models of the comic world.

Kath, for instance, is conventionally comic in the way she pretends to more refinement and propriety than she actually possesses. This is clear from the subtle but effective opening lines of the play when Kath is proudly showing off her ordinarily middle-class home as if it were a lavishly furnished mansion: "This is my lounge. I should change the curtains. Those are our winter ones. The summer ones are more of a chintz." The audience laughs at this dialogue out of a sense of superiority because it immediately sees the disparity between Kath's pretensions and the reality of her life. And implicit in this laughter is a subtle moral judgment-that human beings ought to be honest with themselves and not give in to shallow aspirations for social status. In the rest of the play, Kath's comic posturing grows even funnier as she constantly attempts to hide her ravenous sexual appetite behind a facade of "motherly" affections. And for most of the play Ed generates much of the same kind of laughter for many of the same kinds of reasons.

Sloane, however, is a more disturbing figure in Orton's comic world because it is clear from the beginning that he is genuinely dangerous. He is not a clumsy pretender who is easy to see through, and his opportunism is not amateurish and silly; he is an adept conniver who appears able to get anything he wants, a potent force for potential evil who has killed once and will kill again. What's more, he is sociopathically devoid of conscience or morals; he sees any act as acceptable as long as it gets him what he desires Comedy thrives on the threat of pain and unhappiness, but in the classic comic world there is a tacit agreement with the audience that the pain and unhappiness will not be enduring or genuine. In fact, part of the audience's superiority as witnesses to a comedy is their understanding that the problems the characters are fretting over will eventually be solved and seem insignificant in the glow of the comic resolution. But

when comedies get more "dark," as in Shakespeare's problem farces like *Measure for Measure* or in existentialist comedies such as Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot,* the specter of real pain and unhappiness rises to threaten the typical reassurance of the comic world. Very few comedy writers can successfully include real and enduring pain-much less death-in their comic worlds because human beings take genuine pain and death very seriously and will have to consider themselves insensitive if they laugh at such subjects. Orton, of course, was well aware of the boundaries of comedy and purposely sought to upset this tacit agreement with the audience about ultimate safety, forcing his audience to laugh where he knew they would find their laughter ultimately uncomfortable.

This happens most notably in *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* when Kemp dies at the end of Act II. Nearly blind and deaf, physically weak to the point of "shuffling" when he walks, Kemp seems perhaps mentally impaired as well, "a slate off" as Sloane puts it. Victimized by his own children, Kemp is an outcast in his own house, soon bound for an old folks home, and he ultimately strikes the audience as a pathetic figure, not suitable as an object of ridicule; laughter at Kemp's expense will make the audience seem cruel. But in forcing laughter on his audience Orton does not permit it to extend Kemp any sympathetic feelings. The height of Kemp's pathos perhaps comes in an exchange with Kath in Act I when he says "I'm all alone.. . . You don't love me. . . . I'm going to die, Kath. . . . I'm dying" and Kath angrily responds, " "You've been at that ham haven't you?" The incongruity other response is cruel but also irresistibly funny and the audience's complicity through their laughter tests the boundaries of comedy. These boundaries are more severely tested at the end of Act II when Kemp actually dies at the hands of the smoothly vicious Sloane. Kemp is the only one of the characters in the play who is concerned with conventional morality. When he recognizes Sloane as the murderer of his former boss, he is determined to notify the police, even when Sloane first bribes and then threatens him. When there's a question of justice to be met, Kemp refuses to be concerned with his own safety or with practicality, but Orton does not permit his audience to admire these qualities. Instead, in Kemp's death, Orton introduces genuine pain and injustice into his comic world and, by presenting the event in a humorous context, provokes unsettled feelings for many viewers.

Those critics who most admire Orton's work, like his biographer John Lahr, often see Orton as an accomplished satirist. They see him savagely attacking the hypocrisy of conventional middle class values and expertly demonstrating that beneath the facade of respectability and refined language the characters are frequently, if not exclusively, self-centered. Lahr illustrated this admiration for Orton by beginning his introduction to the collected plays with these words: ""like all great satirists, Joe Orton was a realist. He was prepared to speak the unspeakable; and this gave his plays their joy and danger. He teased an audience with its sense of the sacred, flaunting the hard facts of life people contrived to forget. There were, for Orton, no "basic human values.' Man was capable of every bestiality; and all moral credos were heroic daydreams, the luxury of affluence."

But satire in its highest form, like comedy, always entails a moral purpose, implicit as it might be in the hands of great artists. The classic satirists like Alexander Pope,

Jonathan Swift, Moliere, or Richard Brinsley Sheridan used ridicule to point out a divergence from common sense or some rational norm. They hoped, through their attacks on the foolish and wayward to lure people back into the fold of sensible behavior. Pope, for example, hoped to reconcile warring families when he wrote *The Rape of the Lock* and Moliere was suggesting that idealism could be carried too far when he wrote *The Misanthrope.* Does Orton have a similar satiric purpose?

While Orton's supporters admire his wit and humor, a fairly significant number of Orton's critics have contended, as Lahr himself admits, that Orton had no moral purpose in his Writing, that his comedy was "anarchic," to employ a commonly-used term, implying a complete denial of moral absolutes or belief in behavioral norms These Critics often offer alongside a clear appreciation for Orton's genius a tempering reservation about the ultimate artistic value of his work, often suggesting that his comedy reflects more of the adolescent's need for rebellion than the satirist's desire to reform.

Benedict Nightingale, for eXample, in *Encounter,* wrote that Orton's celebration of "the tripes, the glands and, of course, the genitals. . [the] delight in the overthrow of reason and the breakdown of order. .. can, as I say, prove liberating, even exhilarating, in the theatre. [But] there is also something about its greedy, sticky-fingered hedonism that can only be called infantile." In another essay in the *New Statesman,* Nightingale put Orton's work in the larger context of the comic tradition, stating that while comedy can be cynical and cruel, it is rarely presented in such extremes as evidenced in Orton's work. Nightingale felt that the playwright had "an indiscriminate scorn for most things human, from institutions to affections." In this world neither reason nor concern for one's fellow human has a place, and the pursuit of one's singular pleasure is all that matters. As the critic summarized, "it is this gleeful nihilism that characterizes Orton-this that makes him fascinating and, to me, repellent and suspect. Could it be that, as a promiscuous homosexual and onetime jailbird, he found it necessary to prove that the world's judges, coppers, civil servants, psychiatrists and sturdily married heterosexuals were no better than himself? If everyone else is bad, it's easier to live with one's own excesses if everyone else is telling lies about themselves, one can at least congratulate oneself on one's honesty." Nightingale closed his assessment by stating that despite being "a sparkling comedian and a smirking hooligan," the critic saw "more complacent hedonism than reformist zeal in his work."

Martin Esslin, renowned theatre critic and author of the seminal book, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (1961), expressed similar reservations about the nihilistic qualities of Orton's world. In an essay entitled "Joe Orton: The Comedy of (III) Manners" in *Contemporary English Drama,* Esslin asserted that Orton's satiric attacks were "merely for the elation of having got away with it." Comparing Orton's work with the "savage indignation" of writers like Jonathan Swift, Esslin found that in Orton "rage is purely negative, it is unrelated to any positive creed, philosophy, or programme of social reform." Esslin suggested that "behind Orton's attack on the existing state of humanity in the West there stands nothing but the rage of the socially and educationally under-privileged. . . he articulates, in a form of astonishing elegance and eloquence, the same rage and helpless resentment which manifests itself in the wrecked trains of football supporters, the mangled and vandalized telephone kiosks and the obscene graffiti on lavatory walls"

Comparing Orton's work to the ground-breaking dark comedy of Samuel Beckett, Esslin suggested that "this is neither the bitter laugh of which Beckett speaks, the laugh about that which is bad in the world. . . but the mindless laugh which. . .amounts to no more than an idiot's giggle at his own image in the mirror."

Finally, C. W. E. Bigsby, *author of Joe Ortonin* the "Contemporary Writers" series, found Orton's art merely "a provocation, an act of revenge, a deliberate flouting of authority and flaunting of his own exhibitionist tendencies." And in what could perhaps equally be Said of *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* Bigsby says of *Loot'* 'it was very clearly an act of public revenge for the humiliations society had inflicted upon him in an equally public way. . . it was a play that very deliberately set out to flout all normal standards of good taste."

Nightingale perhaps summed it up best: "as it is, we are left with a tantalizing, maddening blend of wit, the *agent provocateur* and the child hoodlum: enough to keep critical discussion and disagreement on the bubble for a long time."

Despite the mixed feelings of these critics, there are many others who perceive Orton's work as social reportage, a presentation, in the extreme, of middle class life as it truly exists beneath its homogenous veneer. While a certain amount of bitterness in the playwright's message is undeniable (as Bigsby contended), Orton's bile can be attributed to the incongruity of the lifestyle in which he was raised and, during his younger years, was prohibited to speak of. Orton sought to expose middle class conformity, to Strip away the superficial normalcy so many sought to preserve. He wanted to show that humor and pain, farce and death, can often occur simultaneously. Above all, Orton targeted those who publicly claimed high morals while privately pursuing their whim despite the cost to others. By illustrating this hypocrisy with dark humor, forcing the audience to laugh (and often cringe) at such behavior, Orton hoped to strip away such superficiality in both his targets and even, perhaps, in his audiences.

Source: Terry R Nienhuis, for *Drama for Students,* Gale, 1998.

Critical Essay #2

Brantley reviews a 1997 production of Orton's play, praising the staging for preserving the playwright's clever wordplay while also enhancing the theatrical experience with new sensorial touches.

It isn't what most people would think of as a sexually tantalizing smell: floral, fruity and unquestionably synthetic, it is as welcome to the nostrils as a vinyl handkerchief. But for the blowzy, middle-aged Kath, played to pulpy perfection by Ellen Parker in the new revival of Joe Orton's *Entertaining Mr. Sloane,* this aerosol room freshener is just what's needed for seducing a strapping lad with the smoothest skin she's ever seen.

Smell, thank goodness, is not a sense that's much exploited in the theater. But when Ms. Parker's strawberry spray wafts into the audience at the Classic Stage Company, it feels ingeniously apt, an aromatic equivalent of what you've been hearing on stage. Orton's characters do indeed seem to speak the verbal equivalent of cheap air freshener: a canned amalgam of bourgeois pieties and dime novel sentiments that never conceal the gamy lust and avarice beneath.

The appeal of this deliciously dark-minded comedy from 1964 rests more completely on language than do Orton's masterpieces of physical farce, *Loot* and *What the Butler Saw.* But the new Classic Stage production, directed by David Esbjornson, cleverly scales up the sensory experience of the show, carried out to the last garish, eye popping detail of Narelle Sissons' sets and Michael Krass's costumes. And in so doing, it deftly mirrors the tacky social surfaces with which the characters overlay all manner of ungodly acts.

Indeed, Mr. Orton's amoral creatures can get away with absolutely anything-murder, sexual blackmail and one of the sickest me a trois in theater history-as long as there's an oily platitude at hand. This, after all, is a play in which the title character (Neil Maffin), after kicking an old man into insensibility, murmurs blandly, "All this could have been avoided." And in which Kath speaks sweetly of her maternal instincts while planting a kiss on Sloane's lips that is anything but motherly.

The key to playing Orton's hypocrites-as opposed to, say, Moliere's or Wycherly's-is in never acknowledging any contradiction between word and deed. Fortunately, this is a fact of which Mr. Esbjornson's crackerjack four-member ensemble, rounded out by Brian Murray and George Hall, are acutely and enjoyably aware.

The pivot of the play is Sloane, a wastrel Adonis whom Kath, a girlish frump with delusions of gentility, brings home as a lodger. Never mind that he can't pay the rent; Mr. Sloane, as she will insist on addressing him, is most useful in other ways.

There are complications. Kath's geriatric father (Mr. Hall) doesn't like the intruder, whom he seems to remember in connection with a murder. And Kath's brother, Ed (Mr. Murray), a loutish businessman with a deep-felt nostalgia for the "pure" pleasures of

boyhood athletics, hires the lad as a chauffeur, with the clear possibility of optional services.

There will be a death, a pregnancy and two violent assaults before the show is over. But the characters' Teflon dialogue can accommodate all this with the same chipper vapidity with which Kath describes those pretty tulips over by the municipal offices. In Orton's world, steeped on a daily brew of television, B-movies, tabloids and threadbare saws, denaturized language has become both anesthetic and ultimate defense.

Mr. Esbjornson's production occasionally flirts with a dangerous, self-conscious jokiness But he understands that the momentum of *Sloane* relies on a sustained perception of shifting power among its characters, a process to which his actors are finely tuned.

Mr Maffin, an atypically lanky, Nordic Sloane, turns his height into the perfect territorial weapon as he roams over the furniture like an overgrown cat

And he locates Sloane's essential passivity, molding himself into the wayward son, assault thug or sports-loving mate that each of the others expects him to be.

Mr. Murray plays his character's perversely righteous anger beautifully. Mr Hall artfully suggests shrewdness and senility in one breath. But it is Ms. Parker's Kath, a faded butterfly of fluttering affectations and a spine of steel, who best embodies the Orton paradox. And when she primly says to Sloane, "Kiss my hand, dear, in the manner of the theater," she takes utter possession of the show.

Ms. Sissons' conception of what Kath coyly describes as "my lounge" is a lurid marvel of mixed floral patterns and textures, a set that somehow seems to assault the sense of touch as well as sight. The production gives off an almost palpable sense of physical surfaces.

The ways the characters run their fingers over upholstery and clothing take on an obsessive quality in which carnality and consumerism blend seamlessly. And when Kath talks about the smoothness of Sloane's skin, it is chillingly similar to the way she speaks of her newly repaired china shepherdess.

Obviously, for both Ed and Kath, whose calculating eyes belie their talk of rehabilitating their poor orphan boy, Mr. Sloane is just another material comfort, like a nice cigarette case or lawn gnome.

For all his thuggish amorality, he is no match for this cast-iron culture of appearances. The gratifying strength of Mr Esbjornson's production is its gleeful embrace of the premise that surface is indeed everything.

Source: Ben Brantley, "A Houseguest Inspires Not So Maternal Fee1ings" in the *New York Times,* February 22, 1997, pp C13-14.

Critical Essay #3

Cardullo examines the aspects of Orton's play that qualify it as both a "wildly funny" farce and a "profoundly disturbing" social commentary Discussed are such elements as Sloane's sexual malevolence and the Oedipal relationship that is hinted at between Kath and Sloane.

In his introduction to *Joe Orton: The Complete Plays,* John Lahr wrote that "Sloane feels no guilt and his refusal to experience shame is what disturbs and amuses audiences. Sloane is a survivor whose egotism is rewarded, not punished." Sloane implies that he is egotistical, excessively self-loving, because he became an orphan at an early age: "it was the lack of privacy [in the orphanage] I found most trying. *(Pause.)* And the lack of real love." He has no relatives; his parents both died at the same time when he was eight years old. Sloane may amuse as well as disturb audiences, but the vision behind *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* (1964) is wholly disturbing.

The only husband and wife mentioned in the play are Sloane's parents-and they seem to have killed themselves. Kemp is Kath and Ed's father, but he and his son haven't spoken for 20 years, and his daughter treats him as if he were a naughty little boy. Kath and Ed allow Sloane to get away with killing their father in return for sexual favors: he will spend six months of the year *with* Kath and six months with Ed "as long as the agreement last." The first man Sloane killed was Kemp's boss, who was apparently a homosexual. Sloane says that the boss "wanted to photo me. For certain interesting features I had that he wanted the exclusive right of preserving. You know how it is. I didn't like to refuse. No harm in it I suppose. But then I got to thinking." Kath, at 41 or 42, is old enough to be Sloane's mother. In fact, she had a son when she was young by Tommy, Ed's best friend and lover at the time. She says to Sloane, "You're almost the same age as he would be." Kath gave the boy up for adoption and she and Tommy never married The implication is that Sloane is her son. Sloane, Ed's new lover, gets Kath pregnant; they won't marry either, and she will probably give her baby up for adoption. Ed arranged the adoption of Tommy's son, and there is no reason to believe that he will not do the same for Sloane's-Ed refers to the baby Kath is carrying as "him."

Sloane's ego is rewarded, then, by other egotistical, unloved characters' all three substitute sex for love. It is no accident that the Kemp home stands alone in the midst of a rubbish dump-"it was intended to be the first of a row," says the old man. It is a home without love that begets a bastard who himself begets a bastard John Lahr said that Orton, in his depiction of characters like Kath, Ed, and Sloane, "was not being heartless, merely accurate": in their rapaciousness, ignorance, and violence, these people are the representative products of our age No wonder Orton has an old woman make "a special trip [all the way from Woolwich] with her daughter in order to dump a bedstead" outside the Kemp house: it is as If the woman is exhorting her daughter not to risk the marriage bed in times inhospitable to families and children, times peopled by the likes of this dwelling's occupants.

In her last conversation with Ed, Kath, wanting to spend time with Sloane that should be allotted to Ed according to their agreement, says, "it deepens the relationship if the father is there [present at the birth of his child]." Ed replies, "it's all any reasonable child can expect If the dad is present at the conception. Let's hear no more of it." This is wildly funny. But it is also profoundly disturbing, because prophetic: writing a parody on the Oedipal theme in 1964, Orton foresaw at the same time the age of testtube babies, sperm banks, single-parent families, and homosexual fathers and mothers.

Source: Bert Cardullo, "Orton's *Entertaining Mr Sloane"* in *the Explicator,* Volume46, no. 4, Summer, 1988, pp 50-51

Adaptations

Entertaining Mr. Sloane was adapted as a feature film by Canterbury Film in 1970. The screenplay was written by Clive Exton, produced by Douglas Kentish, directed by Douglas Hickox. Beryl Reid stars as Kath, Peter McEnery as Sloane, Harry Andrews as Ed, and Alan Webb as Kemp. This ninety minute film was made more widely available on VHS in 1980 by Thorn EMI Video, in 1989 by Warner Home Video, and in 1990 by HBO Video.

Prick up Your Ears (1987), is a feature film based on John Lahr's biography of Orton. Produced by Andrew Brown and directed by Stephen Frears, the screenplay was written by Alan Bennett and stars Gary Oldman as Orton, Alfred Molina as Kenneth Halliwell, Vanessa Redgrave as Orton's agent, Peggy Ramsey, Julie Walters as Elsie Orton, the playwright's mother, and Wallace Shawn as the biographer John Lahr. The film was distributed in VHS format by Virgin Vision, and Samuel Goldwyn Home Entertainment

Topics for Further Study

Read John Lahr's biography of Orton, *Prick up Your Ears* (1978) or view the 1987 film version of the biography to gather more specific information on Orton's upbringing and relationship with his parents, family, and friends. Discuss how these relationships are reflected in the characters, plot, humor, and tone of *Entertaining Mr. Sloane.*

View the film version of *Entertaining Mr Sloane.* Compare it to your reading of the stage version and discuss the ways in which the film version either succeeds or fails to represent your experience of the play. Decide to what extent the differences between the two versions are related to the differences between the stage and film.

Research the history of homosexuality on stage in twentieth century theatre to see how Orton's portrayal of homosexual behavior relates to the ground-breaking representations of homosexual characters in the 1960s and succeeding decades.

Research the state of sexual permissiveness in the 1960s. You may also want to compare it to the relative openness about sexuality in the 1950s, 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Find specific examples that illustrate permissiveness (or the lack of it) and research explanations for why this openness should change from decade to decade.

Compare and Contrast

1964: *Last Exit to Brooklyn* by American novelist Hubert Selby is published. A London court will convict Selby of obscenity but he will win a reversal on appeal *Entertaining Mr. Sloane,* like all of Orton's unconventional and purposely provocative plays, was often charged with being obscene, and though his plays were never brought to court they were all subject to the censorship of the Lord Chamberlain.

Today: The Theatres Act of 1968 abolished the Lord Chamberlain's role as official censor for stage plays and allowed a much more explicit treatment of sexuality on stage. In today's climate of increased sexual openness, Orton's plays might still seem shocking to some but would no longer be considered obscene except by a small minority .

1964: Playwright John Osborne's *Inadmissible Evidence* is produced at London's Royal Court Theatre. In 1956, Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* had revolutionized British theatre, and though by 1964 Osborne's influence had begun to wane, he was still important enough to lead John Orton to change ills name to Joe Orton to avoid being confused with the celebrated playwright of the 1950s.

Today: After a long period of inactivity as a playwright in the 1970s and 80s, Osborne's last play, *Dejavu* (produced in 1992), attempted to rejuvenate his literary reputation but failed. Billed as a sequel to *Look Back in Anger, Dejavu* closed after a short run and Osborne wed in 1994 without returning to his former glory. In 1971, distinguished British critic John Russell Taylor had written in *The Second Wave* that in *Entertaining Mr. Sloane'* 'Orton managed to write the first solid, well-managed commercial play which belonged, specifically and unmistakably to the post-Osborne era."

1964: Richard Lester's *A Hard Day's Night* was released in August as a film vehicle for the phenomenally popular Beatles. Orton would himself be commissioned to write a script for the musical group, but his *Up against it* was rejected as not wholesome enough for the commercially successful lads from Liverpool.

Today: The Beatles are a legendary part of music history and are influential to millions of listeners and musicians. Unlike many popular groups from the 1960s, the Beatles music sounds as fresh and contemporary today as it was when it was released. The band continues to attract new fans.

1964: The "Profumo Affair" was still powerfully affecting the British psyche. Profumo had admitted to an adulterous affair with Christine Keeler, a 21 year-old model, and the scandal was laced with the suggestion of a possible breach of security since Miss Keeler had been having a simultaneous affair with a Soviet diplomat. The Profumo affair affected Britons for years as it revealed a disparity between surface respectability and the vaunted image of governmental integrity.

Today: Sexual scandals of British figures in high places continue to occur, most recently among the British royal family Itself, but they now seem less shocking as they are calmly assimilated by the tabloid hungry public. As John Lahr put it in *Prick up Your Ears,* "in retrospect, the Profumo affair [now] seems trivial. The overreaction of the British public was a barometer of the society's nervousness about the future of its ruling Establishment. Sexuality represented a threat to the old order."

What Do I Read Next?

Loot (1965) and *What the Butler Saw* (1969) are Orton's most famous plays and works that clearly show his mastery of stage farce.

Not in Front of the Audience: Homosexuality on Stage (1992), by Nicholas de Jongh is a thorough and interesting history of the portrayal of homosexual characters in theatre.

The Orton Diaries, (1986) edited by John Lahr, records the last eight months of Orton's life from December 1966 to August 1967, and includes entries from the diary Orton occasionally kept as an adolescent. Alarmingly explicit in its references to sexuality, these diaries create a portrait of Orton that helps the reader understand the audacious tone and themes of his plays.

The Room (1957) and *The Birthday Party* (1958) are two plays by fellow British dramatist Harold Pinter that clearly influenced Orton's early work *The Homecoming* (1965) is a Pinter play that also involves an "intruder" and sexual sharing.

The Importance of Being Earnest (1895) by Oscar Wilde is a late nineteenth-century comedy of manners that set a brilliant standard for verbal wit that Orton perhaps comes close to matching. In a now widely quoted phrase used in a review of *Loot,* London theatre Critic Ronald Bryden dubbed Orton the "Oscar Wilde of Welfare State gentility."

Not Now Darling (1967) and *Run for Your Wife* (1983) by Ray Cooney are more conventional, commercial British farces that simply seek to entertain their audiences with fast-moving plots and jokes that resemble television sitcoms. While *A Little Hotel on the Side* (1894) or *A Flea in Her Ear* (1907) by the French "Father of Modern Farce," Georges Feydeau, demonstrate how sex can be treated almost antiseptically in farce. *Hay Fever* (1925) or *Private Lives* (1930) by Noel Coward show classic British farce that focuses more on witty dialogue than sexual commotion.

Further Study

Bigsby, C. W. E. *Joe Orton,* Methuen, 1982.

A sophisticated scholarly analysis of Orton's work that places *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* in the context of postmodernist thought. Difficult reading but essential for the advanced study of Orton's drama.

Charney, Maunce. *Joe Orton,* Grove Press, 1984.

In a chapter on *Entertaining Mr. Sloane,* Charney focuses on the characters' use of language as a way of finding their true selves.

Dean, Joan F "Joe Orton and the Redefinition of Farce" in *Theatre Journal,* December, 1982, pp. 481-92.

An article that examines the ways in winch Orton altered the practice of stage farce to take it beyond the conventional boundaries of light entertainment.

Lahr, John. *Prick up Your Ears: The Biography of Joe Orton,* Knopf, 1978

The definitive biography of Joe Orton, written by the son of the great concoctor, Bert Lahr (he played the Cowardly Lion in *The Wizard of Oz)* Very readable and an indispensable guide to any question involving Orton's life and work. Contains passages from the *The Orton Diaries.*

Nakayama,Randalls. "Domesticating Mr Sloane" in *Theatre Journal,* May, 1993, pp. 185-96.

This article is a portrait of Orton that offers a different perspective from the one found in Lahr's biography.

Rusinko, Susan. *Joe Orton,* Twayne, 1995.

An accessible critical biography of Orton with a useful chapter on *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* that puts the play in the context of Orton's life and other works.

Sypher, Wylie. *Comedy,* Johns Hopkins, 1956.

A collection of three classic essays examining the theoretical (and moral) bases of comedy' George Meredith's "An Essay on Comedy," Henri Bergson's "Laughter," and Sypher's own "The Meanings of Comedy." Provides an excellent understanding of comedy m fiction, giving the reader a strong background with winch to analyze Orton's work as it fits into the concept of comedy.

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Taubman, Howard. "Aiming at Easy Targets" in the *New Times,* October 24, 1965, section 2, p. 1.

Taylor, John Russell. "Joe Orton" in *The Second Wave. British Drama for the Seventies,* Methuen, 1971, p. 140.

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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

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

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

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

Selection Criteria

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

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- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
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- 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.
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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.
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Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

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

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

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