Golden Boy Study Guide

Golden Boy by Clifford Odets

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Introduction

Golden Boy was Clifford Odets's most successful theatrical production. First published in 1937 in the United States, the play was a dramatic departure from Odets's previous plays—social dramas that had propelled the playwright to instant stardom. Unlike these early plays, which many later critics dismissed as propaganda pieces, *Golden Boy* focused more on personal issues. Odets has stated in interviews that he wrote the play as a deliberate attempt to create a hit. It was his intention to use the profits from the play's production to help support the Group Theatre, the famous theatre that had produced his first plays and where most of his friends still acted. The play was written after Odets returned from a screenwriting job in Hollywood, a position that drew criticism from those who had pinned their hopes on Odets as a social reformer. In fact, many critics have noted that the struggle that Joe Bonaparte, Odets's protagonist, faces in *Golden Boy* mirrors the struggle that Odets himself faced.

While Odets was torn between Hollywood and the New York theatre scene, Joe is torn between the high-pressure, big-money business of boxing and his dream of becoming a violinist. Joe's dilemma is complicated when he finds somebody who is willing to sponsor him as a boxer and risks injuring his hands—a fatal blow to his career as a violinist. Although Joe receives advice from his father, a lovable Italian man, the strongest influences in the play turn out to be his managers as well as Lorna, the girlfriend of one of his managers—with whom he falls in love. While there are no direct references to Hollywood, some critics have surmised that Odets's story was an attempt to snub Hollywood in his drama, something that he did more overtly with his 1949 play, *The Big Knife*. *Golden Boy* spawned a movie and a musical, both of which combined with the play to make a lasting impression. A current copy of the play is available in *Waiting for Lefty and Other Plays*, published by Grove Press in 1993.

Author Biography

Odets was born on July 18, 1906, in Philadelphia. Odets's father, Louis, was a printer who owned his own printing plant by the time Odets was twelve. Odets's father also eventually owned a lucrative advertising agency. When Odets quit high school in 1923 to pursue poetry and then acting, his father was infuriated. However, he eventually gave his permission for Odets to try to be an actor.

During the next seven years, Odets acted in a number of roles, but was not very successful, although in 1929 he was hired as an understudy for Spencer Tracy in Warren F. Lawrence's *Conflict.* Another member of the play's cast introduced Odets to the Theatre Guild, which in turn led him to the Group Theatre, which he joined in 1930. As a starving artist and a witness to the effects of the Great Depression, Odets, like others, searched for a solution to the country's ills. In 1934, Odets briefly joined the American Communist Party, although he left eight months later. In 1935, Odets and the Group Theatre produced the playwright's first play, *Waiting for Lefty*, a fiery one-act play that detailed the horrors ordinary union workers faced. The play, which used the 1934 New York City cab strike as its setting, advocated striking and its passion quickly won over critics and audiences, which made Odets a star overnight. Following this success, Odets and the Group Theatre produced another social drama, *Awake and Sing!* also in 1935.

However, after his next two plays, *Till the Day I Die* and *Paradise Lost* (both produced in 1935), failed to generate the same kind of success, Odets accepted a job as a screenwriter in Hollywood. Although he has publicly stated that this decision was a move to make more money to support the Group Theatre, it was viewed by many as a desertion from the social cause. In fact, in his next play *Golden Boy* (1937), the protagonist, Joe, must decide between art and material success, and many critics cited Odets's own struggle with this issue. Following *Golden Boy*, Odets wrote several more plays, most of which were not successful.

Although Odets was widely regarded in his early career as the greatest American playwright since Eugene O'Neill, Odets's works rarely earned the major awards that O'Neill's did. However, Odets was awarded a New Theatre League Award and the Yale Drama Prize in 1935, both for *Waiting for Lefty*. In addition, he received an Award of Merit Medal from the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1961. Odets died on August 14, 1963, in Los Angeles.

Plot Summary

Act 1, Scene 1

Golden Boy opens in the Broadway office of fight manager, Tom Moody. Moody fights with his girlfriend, Lorna Moon, over the fact that Moody has not yet divorced his wife and married Lorna. A boy comes in and tells Moody that his fighter, Mr. Kaplan, has broken his hand and cannot fight his opponent, the Baltimore Chocolate Drop, that night. The boy, Joe Bonaparte, offers to fight instead. Moody laughs at the idea at first, but is desperate for another boxer, and so he agrees to it.

Act 1, Scene 2

Later that night, at the Bonaparte home, Joe's father, Mr. Bonaparte, sits at the table with his Jewish friend, Mr. Carp, and his son-in-law, Siggie. Mr. Bonaparte refuses to buy Siggie a taxicab, but later shows Mr. Carp the expensive violin that he plans on giving to Joe for his twenty-first birthday the next day. Frank Bonaparte, Mr. Bonaparte's oldest son and a labor organizer, sees an article in the paper that talks about Joe's fight. Joe comes in and says that he may take a break from music to fight some more and make some real money. He is ashamed of his poverty and sees fighting as the answer to his problems. As a result, Mr. Bonaparte holds back from giving Joe his birthday present.

Act 1, Scene 3

Two months later, Moody, his partner Roxy Gottlieb, Joe's trainer, Tokio, and Lorna sit in Moody's office, discussing the fact that Joe is holding back in the ring, a situation that is killing Joe's popularity as a boxer. Lorna leaves and Mr. Bonaparte comes in, revealing the fact that Joe is afraid to hurt his hands because it will destroy his chances at a music career. The men try to appeal to Joe to give up his dream of being a musician and to embrace boxing, but Joe is unsure. Later, Moody explains the situation to Lorna, who says she will coerce Joe into fighting.

Act 1, Scene 4

A few nights later, Joe and Lorna sit on a park bench, talking. Joe is defensive of his differences, including his crossed eyes, and wishes that he could use his music to get even with the people who have made fun of him in the past. Lorna seizes on this as a way to promote the fighting lifestyle, by saying he can take out his aggressions on other people. Joe tries to analyze Lorna and talk about her affair with Moody, but she is violently opposed to his questions. Joe talks about how he really wants a fast sports car, and Lorna says that if he fights he will get the money to buy one. Joe agrees to fight.

Act 1, Scene 5

One week later, Joe and Lorna are at the Bonaparte home. While Joe packs a suitcase for his Midwest fighting tour, Lorna drinks heavily, and talks to Siggie, Anna, and Mr. Bonaparte about her hurtful past. Mr. Bonaparte asks Lorna to watch out for Joe, and to help him find his true path in life. When Joe is leaving, Mr. Bonaparte tries to give him the violin that he bought for him. Joe briefly plays the instrument, but then tells his father to return it. Joe asks his father for his blessing on his boxing career, but Mr. Bonaparte refuses and tells him to be careful for his hands.

Act 2, Scene 1

Six months later, Moody, Roxy, Lorna, and Tokio watch Joe as he trains in the gym, and note that Joe is still occasionally distracted by memories of his music. Eddie Fuseli, a renowned gambler and gangster, comes in and says he wants to help manage Joe. Moody refuses at first, until they leave it up to Joe, who agrees to let Fuseli help manage him as long as Fuseli does not interfere in his personal life as the others have. Later, Moody worries that Joe is getting too hard to manage and encourages Lorna to seduce Joe away from fast cars and his old life.

Act 2, Scene 2

A few nights later, Joe and Lorna sit in the park again. Joe confesses his love for Lorna, and encourages her to leave Moody. Lorna says that she cannot because Moody needs her and because she feels sorry for him. When Joe keeps pushing, asking her what she gets out of the relationship, she tells him how Moody rescued her from poverty. She says that she wants peace and quiet, not love, because she has been hurt by love before. However, Joe persists, and she confesses her love for him saying that she will break off her relationship with Moody.

Act 2, Scene 3

In Moody's office the next day, Lorna is restless, and they argue. Moody tells Lorna that his wife is granting him a divorce and that he can finally marry Lorna. Moody says that he does not like the way that Joe looks at Lorna, and they argue some more. Lorna suggests that she is going to leave him, but changes her mind when she sees that her leaving would destroy Moody. Joe and Fuseli walk into the office and catch Moody and Lorna kissing. Joe argues with Moody and Fuseli threatens Moody to leave Joe alone. Joe says that Lorna loves him, but Lorna professes her love for Moody. Joe and Fuseli leave and Lorna confesses to Tom that she loves Joe.

Act 2, Scene 4

Six weeks later in the dressing room before the Lombardo fight, Mr. Bonaparte and a number of others come and go, distracting Joe. Fuseli helps to clear out the room and leaves Joe alone with Tokio, who preps Joe for the fight. Although Joe is frustrated from the visits at first, he eventually starts shadow boxing, full of energy. Joe leaves to fight Lombardo, just as Pepper White, another boxer, comes back from winning his fight. Mr. Bonaparte comes back into the dressing room and sees Pepper's deformed knuckles. He realizes that if Joe continues, his hands will be useless for anything except fighting. Joe comes in from his fight and reveals that he has broken his hand—signaling his total conversion into a fighter.

Act 3, Scene 1

Six months later Joe is in Moody's office with Moody, Roxy, Tokio and two sports writers, one of whom is turned off by Joe's cocky attitude. The other writer congratulates Moody on his engagement to Lorna, which is news to Joe. When Joe is alone, Lorna comes in and they soon start to argue. She accuses him of turning into a killer like Fuseli. Lorna leaves and Fuseli comes in. The two are dressed almost alike, another sign that Joe has succumbed to a materialistic lifestyle. Joe tries to leave his boxing career, but changes his mind when Fuseli threatens him.

Act 3, Scene 2

The next day, Lorna waits in Joe's dressing room while he is fighting the Chocolate Drop. Fuseli comes in and tells her to leave town, since she is distracting Joe. Joe comes in from his fight and stops Fuseli from drawing his gun on Lorna. Joe soon finds out that his win against the Chocolate Drop has killed the boxer. Although Joe's management focuses on the fact that it was a clean fight and Joe does not have to worry about being prosecuted, Joe is horrified that he has killed a man. Lorna decides to leave Moody. She and Joe flee the city in his sports car.

Act 3, Scene 3

At the Bonaparte home, Fuseli, Moody, Roxy, and Joe's family wait for Joe to arrive, while Joe's management celebrates Joe's win. They are not sympathetic to the death of the boxer, but are stunned when they find out from a phone call that their prized possession, Joe, has died in a car crash. Moody is especially distraught over the loss of Lorna. The play ends with Mr. Bonaparte preparing to go claim Joe's body and bring it home.

Act 1, Scene 1

Act 1, Scene 1 Summary

This scene is set in the office of small time boxing manager, Tom Moody. As the play opens Moody is in the middle of a fight with his girlfriend Lorna. She is trying to convince him to leave his wife and marry her. He keeps telling her to be patient and reminds her that his wife wants a large chunk of money to agree to a divorce. Lorna's temper calms and she forgives him. Moody promises that if one of his fighters, Kaplan, wins his bout tonight he'll buy her something expensive. Lorna tells him that Kaplan won't win, and Moody admits she's right. He tells her how desperate he is for a good fighter to come along and make him some money. Lorna tells him that whatever happens, she'll love him forever.

As Moody and Lorna kiss, a boy arrives with some bad news - Kaplan broke his hand in a sparring match at the gym. Moody frantically tries to call Tokio, Kaplan's trainer, and complains to Lorna that he'll have to cancel the fight. The boy tells him that canceling won't be necessary. He can fight instead. Moody practically laughs him out of the office, but the boy calmly points out one of the opponent's weaknesses and how to get past it. Moody tells him that lots of fighters have tried the same technique and been beaten. When he asks the boy if he's ever heard of those fighters the boy asks whether Moody has heard of him and introduces himself by the last name of Bonaparte. When Moody laughs and teases him about his name, the boy says to call him Joe. Moody continues to laugh but then Joe angrily grabs him by his lapels. Moody shakes him off.

Tokio comes in and reveals that Joe was the fighter Kaplan was sparring with when he broke his hand. Moody is so surprised he can't speak. The phone rings and Moody answers. It's Roxy, the owner of the club where Kaplan was supposed to fight that night. Moody tells him that Kaplan's backing out but that he's got a replacement. When he hangs up, Joe tells him he'll be surprised.

Act 1, Scene 1 Analysis

This scene uses quick, blunt language and emotions to set up both the events of the play and its tone. Right from the beginning we feel like we are at ringside during a boxing match, watching characters punch each other with words and sudden shifts in feeling. This is true of Lorna as much as it's true of the male characters. She's able to give as good as she gets, which makes her less of an outsider in this testosterone-dominated world than other, more feminine, women.

This scene also establishes that the dramatic and thematic focus of the story is what things cost. The first problem is the money that Moody's wife wants for a divorce; and money plays a role in just about every relationship and every scene. But cash isn't the only currency being dealt with here. Spiritual qualities like integrity, self-worth, and self-

truth are also spent by several of the characters in pursuit of their ultimate goals - fame, riches, happiness, love, etc. In short, this scene immediately and vividly sets up what we're seeing as a story about the American Dream, the pursuit of success, and what it costs to realize that dream. It's no accident that the play and its lead character, Joe, are called *Golden Boy*, gold being just about the most valuable metal and Joe being just about the most valuable thing that most of the characters have ever encountered. This includes Lorna, who at first sees him as a source of money like Moody but comes to discover that he's actually a priceless source of true love.

Act 1, Scene 2

Act 1, Scene 2 Summary

This scene is set in the lower middle class home of the Bonaparte family. Joe's father, an Italian immigrant, sits with his friend, Mr. Carp, reading the paper. Siggie, Bonaparte's son-in-law, asks him to buy him a cab so he and Joe can work their own company as opposed to making money for another boss. When Mr. Bonaparte responds with one or two word answers, it's clear they've had this conversation before and the answer this time will be the same as it's always been. "No."

Anna, Bonaparte's daughter and Siggie's wife, comes out of their bedroom, asks Siggie to come to bed, and asks her father why he won't buy the cab. Siggie asks how many thousands Bonaparte has in the bank, but Bonaparte doesn't answer the question. Siggie tells Bonaparte that all he wants to do is raise a family like a normal man, with some dignity. Bonaparte and Carp say good night, and Anna and Siggie go off to bed.

Bonaparte notices that it's one o'clock and wonders where Joe is, saying he's worried. Carp asks him what will happen when the war comes, Bonaparte scoffs at the idea of war; but then Carp asks him how worried he'd be if Joe, who just won a scholarship to study the violin at a prestigious school, was drafted. This prompts Bonaparte to show Carp the violin he bought for Joe for twelve hundred dollars. Carp describes it as looking like "a coffin for a baby," but Bonaparte calls it a golden present. Carp tries to convince him that there's no way anyone can make a living as a musician, but Bonaparte tells him that Joe doesn't have to be a millionaire to be happy and describes music as a great source of happiness.

Frank, Bonaparte's eldest son and Joe's big brother, comes home with some late edition newspapers, some of which mention war. As Bonaparte and Carp argue over the merits of baseball, Frank discovers Joe's picture in the paper. Just then Joe comes home bruised and bandaged. He tells them he got into a fight in the park but, when he's confronted with the newspaper photo, confesses the truth and angrily tells his family that because he's about to turn twenty one it's time he did something with his life. He tells them that he's tired of sitting around home and watching the world go by and having no possessions and that he's taking a vacation from music. Bonaparte tells him that he doesn't have a fighter's nature and asks whether fighting is what he really wants to do. Joe abruptly goes to bed. Carp comments that in his youth he heard stories of America's streets being paved with gold, and tells Bonaparte he forgot to give Joe his violin. Bonaparte says he doesn't know what to do.

Act 1, Scene 2 Analysis

This play was written and first performed in the late 1930's, which is important for two reasons. The 1930's was the time of the Great Depression, when a large percentage of

the American population was both out of work and desperate for hope, for something to believe in. In this context, the driving need for money takes on the additional weight of being something in generally short supply. This context also adds dimension to the fame aspect of Joe's quest, in that the public's hunger for his success increases his hunger for their approval.

The second reason why the time the play was written is important is that in the late 1930's, Hitler was already on the move in Europe. This makes the references to war real, immediate and ever-present in the minds of anyone watching this play at the time.

The family name "Bonaparte" is, of course, the same name as the famous French emperor Napoleon Bonaparte. The name represents the arrogance and over-confidence that ultimately led to Napoleon's defeat in the Battle of Waterloo, which is the same kind of arrogance and over-confidence that emerges in Joe later in the play. The difference between the two Bonapartes is that Napoleon ended up dying in exile as a result of his arrogance, while Joe is redeemed by love, even though he dies in an accident.

Context aside, in terms of the dramatic action, money plays an important role in both this scene and the general relationships within Joe's family and friends. Siggie is angling for money, so he can be a good and successful father, Bonaparte is spending his savings to fulfill Joe's dream, Carp is concerned whether living that dream can make Joe enough money to live on. Bonaparte's response to Carp's concerns is actually the play's thematic argument, which is that it's important to be happy doing something you love and having a lot of money doesn't matter. The negative aspect of this theme, that destruction of both body and soul can result from denying happiness in order to make money, is developed through the later action of the play.

The mention of war foreshadows both the conflict and destruction to come and Joe's spiritual death. Carp's description of the violin case as a coffin foreshadows Joe's physical and spiritual deaths. Bonaparte's reference to the violin being a golden gift and Carp's comments about America's streets being paved with gold are both ironic given that Joe is given the nickname "golden boy" when he achieves fame as a fighter and ends up hating himself and his choices. This irony reinforces the idea that the central conflicts of the play revolve around money.

Joe's sudden explosion comes out of nowhere, almost as though he's prepared what he's going to say and is going to say it no matter what. He comes across as defensive and willful, as though he's trying to convince himself. He continues to talk himself into his choices around fighting throughout the play, which suggests that on some level he knows that he belongs in the world of music.

Act 1, Scene 3

Act 1, Scene 3 Summary

This scene takes place in Moody's office, two months later. Moody, Lorna and Tokio listen as Roxy (the fight club owner mentioned in the first scene) tells them how his patrons aren't all that crazy about watching Joe fight. Lorna tries to convince the men that they have to handle Joe carefully but Roxy doesn't want to hear from a woman. Lorna leaves. Roxy goes on to complain that although Joe's a good defensive fighter he doesn't attack, almost as though he's saving his hands. Tokio urges Moody and Roxy to trust that Joe is a good fighter and will fight more aggressively once he's more experienced. Moody isn't quite sure, and reveals his plans to take Joe on a boxing tour of the Midwest.

Bonaparte appears, anxious to meet the people he calls Joe's new friends. Roxy and Moody tell him that they're trying to do their best to make Joe a success but Joe isn't fully accepting what they're offering. Bonaparte explains that he understands that Joe wants to not feel ashamed of his life and have success, but he also understands why Joe wants to save his hands, proudly telling them about Joe's skills as a violinist. He then reveals that he wants to help his son, but that he wants Joe to decide for himself what is his best course of action. He sees the possibility that fighting might be good for Joe and leaves, telling the other men to not tell Joe he was there.

Moody and Roxy realize that what they have to do is gently convince Joe that it's in his best interests, not just theirs, for him to pursue a career in fighting. The conversation is interrupted by a phone call from someone whom Moody dismissively identifies as Eddie, who wanted to know whether Moody thinks Joe will win his fight on Tuesday. After he tells Tokio that it's his job to make sure Joe wins, Moody tells Roxy to leave the job of smooth-talking Joe to him. Roxy agrees.

Lorna returns. Joe follows her in. Moody tells him he's lining up the Midwest tour and starts hinting that there can be no distractions. Joe immediately realizes that something's being pulled on him and asks Tokio to tell him what's going on. Tokio tells him that they know that Joe's taking care of his hands, and Roxy bursts out with a comment that he sees musicians playing music in the park all the time and calls them bums. Moody sharply tells Roxy to go have lunch, and Roxy leaves. Joe tells Moody that he hasn't made up his mind that fighting is what he wants to do. Tokio says he'll see Joe the next day at the gym. After a moment, Joe leaves, followed shortly afterwards by Tokio.

Moody and Lorna are alone. Moody's wife calls, asking for more money. After he hangs up Moody tells Lorna that unless he can get Joe to fight, their chances for happiness are done. Lorna hints that she knows a lot of ways of persuasion.

Act 1, Scene 3 Analysis

The dramatic action of this fairly straightforward scene isn't just about Joe's handlers convincing him to fight aggressively or even about them convincing him that fighting to win means more money for all of them. This scene is thematically about the dark side of the American Dream coming into action as Moody and Roxy begin to convince Joe to let go of his source of true happiness so he can freely pursue fame and fortune. The argument of the play, however, is that the true American Dream is the pursuit, not of fame and fortune, but the pursuit of what fulfils personal truth and brings genuine happiness.

This argument is represented by Bonaparte, whose appearance in this scene shows him to be not just a symbol, but also a man of compassion and genuine concern for his son's welfare. This places him in direct and vivid contrast with the other characters, including Lorna, who just want to use Joe to make money and who therefore represent the society that Joe both resents and desperately wants to be part of... the society that lives the money equals success angle of the American Dream. In short, throughout this scene the idea that money, success and happiness are linked is again emphasized.

Act 1, Scene 4

Act 1, Scene 4 Summary

A few nights later Joe and Lorna sit on a park-bench by the side of a busy road. They make small talk about the busyness of the road, the music coming from a nearby carnival, how Frank (Joe's brother) works for a union, how Lorna doesn't work, and how Joe would treat her well if they were together. Joe talks about how he's always felt like an outsider, reading the encyclopedia and loving music the way he does. He tells her that music means the world to him, how he feels he's a man and that he belongs in the world when he's making music but he can't take that feeling with him out on the streets, where he feels that it's war.

Lorna tells him to put all his passion into being a fighter and then let it out, saying she doesn't like him because he's too inside himself. Joe gets angry and accuses her of being with him because Moody wants her to be, not because she wants to herself. He also accuses her of being lost and lonely, and of picking Moody because there was no one else. When Lorna tells him that Moody loves her, he falls silent ... then tells her he wants to buy a big car, and that he wants to be able to speed in a car like he does in the ring so that nobody can get him. He suddenly offers to walk her back to her hotel, and tells her to tell him that the next world champ is ready to go. She asks him whether he really did read those encyclopedias and whether he really is just twenty-one. When he says that they're both true, Lorna comments that there's something wrong somewhere. Joe agrees, and they walk off together.

Act 1, Scene 4 Analysis

For the first time in the play we get to see beneath both Joe's and Lorna's tough exteriors. We see that Joe is a deeply troubled and conflicted soul, and through his perceptions we see that Lorna's is a lonely one. We also see by the end of the scene that fitting in with the world and showing them he's a success is more important to Joe than feeling comfortable with in himself, and letting that be enough success. This sense of his priorities foreshadows his choices throughout the next act and a half of the play, while the revelations of his sensitivity foreshadow his reactions and choices in the play's climactic scene.

The car Joe wants represents several aspects to his character - his desire for material success, his desire to get away from all the people who don't understand him and/or want to control him, and his desire for power. His reference to his fascination with cars as a "poison in his blood" foreshadows his death in a car accident at the end of the play.

In terms of Lorna, we see in spite of her apparent casualness and lightness of tone that she's got her own demons to deal with - loneliness and a reluctance to look beyond the surface of her own life. At the end of the scene we get the sense that they're both more

interested in each other and what they have to offer each other than they let on. This foreshadows their growing interest in each other and their final union at the end.

Act 1, Scene 5

Act 1, Scene 5 Summary

As Joe packs his suitcase for his boxing tour of the Mid West, Siggie, Bonaparte, Anna and Lorna sip wine and talk about their families. Lorna reveals that her father beat her mother, while Anna comments on how Bonaparte never spoke badly to his wife at all. At one point while Joe is out of the room, Lorna asks Bonaparte whether he likes her. He says he does, then asks Lorna to keep an eye on Joe while he's away and to help him to find truthful success. Lorna promises that she will.

Mr. Carp comes by to say good-bye. Joe prepares to load his things into a cab. Before he goes, Bonaparte gives him the violin and tells him to practice while he's on the road. Lorna urges Joe to hurry because they have to make the train, but Joe goes off for a moment and plays. He comes back, gives the violin to his father, and tells him to take it back to where he bought it. He then asks Bonaparte for "the word," to let him know that going off to be a boxer is okay. When Bonaparte seems reluctant Joe tells him that he's living in the past, that he's seeing yesterday where Joe is seeing tomorrow. Bonaparte cries out that Joe going off to be a boxer is not okay and he will not give the word. In the silence that follows he and his son embrace hastily, and then Joe hurries off followed by Lorna.

Siggie and Anna go to bed. Mr. Carp wants to talk philosophy but Bonaparte just stands there, looking down at the violin.

Act 1, Scene 5 Analysis

The entire act has been building to final confrontation between Joe and Bonaparte, who symbolize the two sides of the play's central argument - Joe representing the desire for success, Bonaparte the rewards of happiness. It also represents the age-old conflict between father and son, between wisdom and impulse, between life that's been lived and life that is still being dreamed about. Ultimately, however, the scene's dramatic power lies in the fact that the argument is between two very real human beings fighting desperately to achieve important goals. This is the essence of drama.

In terms of the journey of this play, with his choice to leave the violin behind Joe effectively seals his fate, choosing a path towards fame and fortune in the belief it will make him happy but which, in fact, leaves him empty and despairing.

Act 2, Scene 1

Act 2, Scene 1 Summary

This scene takes place at an athletic club. Moody, Lorna, Roxy and Tokio watch as Joe trains (offstage). Moody congratulates Tokio on how far Joe has come. Roxy agrees that Joe's doing better but expresses concern about Joe being knocked out in a fight in Philadelphia. Tokio tells them that Joe saw a street violinist and didn't seem his usual self afterwards. Roxy suggests that Joe was scared the violinist was an attacker. Lorna starts to suggest it was about something else but Roxy shuts her up. Moody decides it's time to get Joe away from home, where the lure of the violin is too strong.

Eddie Fuseli (the man who called Moody's office earlier) appears. He comments on how good a fighter Joe is and asks if he can become part owner. Moody refuses outright and Fuseli moves away, but doesn't leave. Tokio reveals that Joe bought a fast, expensive car. Moody comments that Joe drives like a maniac, and that they've got to convince him to be careful. Joe comes in, sweaty from his workout, and comments that he feels he's getting better every day. Roxy and Moody tell him they know about the car and are concerned about his well-being. Joe tells them if they're really concerned they can get him some better fights. Moody tells him he's pretty cocky for someone who got knocked out a short time ago, but Joe promises it won't happen again and goes out, followed by Tokio. Moody and Roxy comment that he's changed a lot, but Lorna tells him they're just getting the kind of fighter they wanted.

Fuseli returns and tells them again he wants a piece of Joe. Moody refuses, telling him about the control that Joe's father has. Fuseli persists, suggesting that they let Joe decide. Just then Joe comes in. Moody introduces him to Fuseli, who promises Joe better fights and better press coverage. Joe says that as long as his half interest in himself is protected, he doesn't care about the other half. He goes to spend time with his car. Before Fuseli leaves, he refers to Joe's father and hints that it's easy to get rid of influences like that.

Roxy and Moody complain about Joe's ingratitude. When Lorna suggests that Joe doesn't really have anything to be grateful for, Roxy tells Moody to hurry up and get her pregnant so she'll have something else to do with herself. She tells him he should have kept quiet about Joe's father when Fuseli is so obviously Mafia. Moody tells Lorna he needs her help calming Joe down and she angrily accuses him of wanting her to sleep with him. Roxy discreetly leaves, Moody apologizes, and tells Lorna seductively that if she wants their future together she has to help him. Lorna agrees, and then abruptly leaves.

Act 2, Scene 1 Analysis

The beginning of this scene tells us several things - that Joe is committing more to being a fighter, that he's still haunted by thoughts of his violin, and that Lorna and Moody both realize that could be a real problem. But while Lorna seems to still have compassion for Joe, Moody sees Joe's longings as an obstacle to be overcome. His musings about getting Joe away from his father foreshadows the scene at the end of this act in which the full rift appears between Joe and Bonaparte.

Later in this scene we first see in Joe the arrogance and determination represented by the name Bonaparte. Since his overconfidence is such a sudden and extreme shift and because we know from the first part of the scene that part of him still longs for music, we get the sense that he's still convincing himself that fighting is the right way to go. It's not until later in this act when Joe fights hard enough to break his hand that we see him put the dreams of playing the violin fully to rest.

Fuseli and the car both represent the increasing lure and dangers of fame and fortune, with Moody's reference to Joe's driving foreshadowing Joe's death at the end of the play.

Act 2, Scene 2

Act 2, Scene 2 Summary

Joe and Lorna are again out on the park bench. Joe tells her that some nights he wakes up from a dream feeling like there's something at the foot of his bed reaching for him. When Lorna suggests it's his violin, he suggests that it's her and tells her she's real for him the way music was real, telling her that fighting feels like it doesn't have a point. He talks about how Moody makes him feel like a possession, tells Lorna he wants to be with her all the time, not just one night a week, and tells her he loves her. Lorna says that Moody loves her too, tells Joe that Moody's got things tough with his wife and a sick kid, that Moody's the kind of guy that always starts something new with two strikes against him, and that "he's a kid at forty-two and you're a man at twenty-two."

Joe tries to convince her to open up to him and reveal her heart, saying that he knows she loves him. She tells him that Moody helped her when she was down and just about out, that she owes him, and that she just wants a quiet life, not the excitement of love. She starts to cry, and says it's for only the third time in her life. Joe says that now he knows she loves him, and Lorna admits it's true. He tries to convince her to tell Moody as soon as possible, and she says she'll tell him tomorrow. She adds that she feels the same way about Joe as he feels about her and asks him to take her home with him. They embrace passionately.

Act 2, Scene 2 Analysis

The suggestion of this scene is that these are two people who each realize that the other is a chance for real happiness. Joe still feels false about being a fighter and sees Lorna as a chance to experience some truth and joy in the midst of that falseness. Lorna, even though she fights it, knows Joe is a chance to feel genuine love, not just safety. This is what makes him her "golden boy," not the money he can make.

They both see clearly that Moody has a limited capacity for passion and compassion, yet they're both caught up in his world. In other words, this scene is about two people stuck in emotionally and spiritually restrictive situations that see each other as a way out. It's an intimate and powerful scene that leads us to hope for them and care for them even more. This makes their choices later in this act - Joe's choice to fight and Lorna's choice to stay with Moody - painful and difficult, but still very human.

Act 2, Scene 3

Act 2, Scene 3 Summary

Back in Moody's office the next morning, Lorna fights off a hangover while Moody tells her things are looking up. His wife is now involved with another man and has agreed to the divorce, and at the same time he's signed the contract for a big fight for Joe. He asks Lorna whether she talked to Joe about his driving the night before, but Lorna tells him she didn't see Joe. Moody then excitedly tells Lorna they're on their way, and she tells him he paints beautiful pictures.

Siggie, Joe's brother, comes in with a roll of cash. He tells them that Joe sent it to Bonaparte, but Bonaparte refused it. Siggie complains that Bonaparte is stuck in life, while Joe is out there making life happen. Lorna tells Siggie to tell Bonaparte that she saw Joe last night and he's fine. Moody tells him that he'll make sure that Siggie gets passes to Joe's fights, and Siggie leaves.

Lorna comments on how much in love Siggie and his wife are and how special marriage is. Moody comments that Lorna said earlier she didn't see Joe last night, and Lorna lies again and says she didn't. Moody tells her that he's uncomfortable about the way Joe looks at her, but Lorna changes the subject and starts talking about what a great guy Bonaparte is. Moody says he doesn't like him and doesn't like Joe, but Joe is business and has to be treated that way. He goes on to say that he does love Lorna, and that he's doing it all for her. She says she's leaving him but when she sees how upset he gets she changes her mind and tells him she couldn't leave. He kisses her just as Joe walks in, accompanied by Fuseli.

Moody tells Joe about the upcoming fight, Lorna tells him that his father's worried, Moody gives back the money Siggie brought and asks Fuseli to get Joe to give up the car. Joe asks Lorna why she kissed Moody. Moody instantly gets angry and tells Joe to mind his own business. Joe gets angry as well and they argue violently, with Moody eventually offering to sell his stake in Joe to Fuseli. Joe abruptly announces that he and Lorna love each other and tells Lorna to tell Moody, but she says instead that she loves him (Moody). Joe leaves. Fuseli tells Moody and Lorna to just stick with their business, and leaves. Lorna suddenly bursts into tears. Moody comments that she must really like Joe. Lorna says she loves him.

Act 2, Scene 3 Analysis

Money appears in two important aspects in this scene. Although it's never mentioned, it's the main reason for Moody's happiness about having arranged Joe's upcoming fight. To him it means a future with Lorna - for him money does buy happiness. Siggie's returning of the money that Joe sent to Bonaparte, on the other hand, represents an

outright rejection of that philosophy and also represents Bonaparte's rejection of Joe's version of happiness, which is money and success.

Joe's discovery that his father has rejected the money is the first step toward embracing fighting that he makes in the next scene. The second step is Lorna's betrayal, when she finds herself pressed to admit the truth about her feelings and says she loves Tom. This rejection, perhaps even more than the rejection of the money, is what drives Joe to make the choice he does in the next scene.

Lorna's comments about love and Siggie's marriage are ambiguous in that we're not certain whether she's thinking of her possible marriage to Moody or the love she feels for Joe. We see her vulnerability and confusion clearly in this scene as she veers back and forth between her very real affection for Moody and her growing passion for Joe. A question might be why she says she loves Moody, once to him and once to Joe. The first time it's clearly a result of her seeing how vulnerable he is and how much he loves her. The second time is less easily explained, but one possibility is that Joe comes into the office arrogant and selfish, and in spite of loving him and feeling loved by him Lorna finds this a turn off and says she loves Moody to get revenge.

Act 2, Scene 4

Act 2, Scene 4 Summary

This scene is set in the locker room of a public arena. As the scene begins, there are offstage roars from a crowd watching boxing matches. Bonaparte and Siggie sit on a bench, Tokio busies himself with the contents of a locker, and a fighter named Pepper White is rubbed down by his trainer. Fuseli comes in asking for Joe. Tokio tells him that Moody has him upstairs talking with sports reporters. Fuseli isn't happy about this and is even less happy when Tokio introduces Joe's family. Fuseli tells Tokio that from now on he takes orders from him, and then firmly tells Bonaparte and Siggie that he wants Joe to be focused and thinking of nothing but fighting when he goes into the ring. He also tells them he wants them to be gone when the fight is over, and then leaves. A bell in the distance signifies the start of the next big fight. Siggie wants to go out and watch the other matches, but Bonaparte stubbornly insists he's going to wait for Joe. Siggie goes out.

Lorna comes in looking for Moody but is happy to see Bonaparte, who tells her sadly that Joe isn't coming home any more and that Joe doesn't know he's there. Lorna comments that you could build a city with Joe's determination to succeed, but Bonaparte tells her sadly that you could burn a city down.

Joe comes in followed by Moody and Roxy, and stops cold when he sees Bonaparte. The two men say hello to each other, then Joe demands Lorna leaves. As she goes, he also demands that he not see reporters again before a bout, it makes him nervous. Pepper White taunts him, Joe's temper explodes, and they start a real fight. Fuseli comes in and the fight stops. Pepper White exits. Moody shouts that he's sick of Joe and his arrogance but Joe shouts back that he's all Moody has. Fuseli sends Moody and Roxy out, tries to calm Joe down, tells him to stop paying attention to Lorna and asks whether he wants his father to stay. Joe tells him to leave his father alone, and Fuseli leaves.

As the bell rings in the distance to signal the start of the next fight Joe asks how the family is and why Bonaparte returned the money. When Bonaparte doesn't answer, Joe says he has to fight, that he doesn't want to be different and artistic, that he's out for fame and fortune and will not be ashamed of his life. Bonaparte says he understands, gets up, gives Joe the word that fighting is okay, wishes him luck, and leaves.

Tokio gets Joe to lie on a massage table and begins to rub him down. Joe breaks down and cries. Tokio gently talks to Joe about his opponent's weaknesses and how Joe can defeat them. Joe calms down, sits up, and talks through his game plan for the fight, telling himself that once he's going nobody can stand in his way. He starts shadow boxing, and Tokio smiles to himself.

Pepper comes in, fresh and pumped up from winning his bout. He tries to intimidate Joe but Joe is having none of it, he goes out excitedly followed by Tokio. Pepper talks about how he's looking forward to seeing his girl, but his trainer tells him he won't feel so good if her husband catches him.

Bonaparte returns, telling the trainer that he can't bear to watch the fight. As the crowd shouts in the background Pepper comments that Joe must be getting creamed, but Bonaparte tells him that Joe's winning. As Pepper goes he shows Bonaparte the power in his hands, but Bonaparte only sees how stiff and ruined they are.

The roar of the crowd tells us that somebody's been knocked out. Bonaparte paces angrily. Joe, Moody, Tokio and Roxy come in, celebrating that Joe won the fight by a knockout. As Moody bustles about talking about getting in the reporters and Roxy brags, Eddie comes in and watches. Joe proudly tells Tokio that he'll have to cut off his glove, and that he's broken his hand. He proudly shouts his triumph, and that it's the beginning of the world. Bonaparte turns away.

Act 2, Scene 4 Analysis

The placing of this scene in a locker room while we hear boxing offstage reinforces the idea suggested at the beginning of this analysis, that the dialogue and confrontations are themselves boxing matches of words and emotions. The bell ringing offstage signifies not only the beginning of fights in the public ring, but the beginnings of fights and confrontations such as the one between Bonaparte and Joe.

Their very brief exchange is packed with powerful emotions, particularly Joe's angry passion and Bonaparte's sad vulnerability. His pain is evident when he finally gives Joe the word of acceptance he first asked for in Act 1, and it's the pain rather than the word that is another step to Joe releasing his anger in the ring, fully accepting his choice, rejecting the violin and fully living the life of a fighter. Yet another step comes when he breaks down and cries on the massage table.

The brief discussion between Pepper and his trainer about Pepper's married girlfriend mirrors the relationship between Lorna, Joe and Moody. It makes us wonder how much of Moody's unhappiness with Joe's behavior has to do with Joe's arrogance and how much with Moody's resentment of Lorna's attraction.

Joe's breaking of his hand represents the final stage in his rejection of the violin and music, and therefore of the happiness that he knows is possible for him but which won't buy him things like his fancy car. It's reasonable to assume that in the fight he both released and channeled all his anger at the world for making him feel like an outsider, at his father for rejecting the money and not supporting his choice, and perhaps most importantly at Lorna for saying she loves Tom. From now on Joe's actions are fueled by anger. As a result he becomes more and more reckless. This eventually leads to the tragic death not only of his opponent in Act 3 but his and Lorna's deaths at the end of the play.

Act 3, Scene 1

Act 3, Scene 1 Summary

Moody's office, six months later. Roxy and Tokio watch as Moody and Joe, who's now wearing expensive clothes, talk with two sports reporters, Drake and Lewis. They ask questions about Joe's upcoming fight with a fighter called the Chocolate Drop. Joe predicts an easy win, suggesting that the writers pick the round and that's when the knockout will be. The older writer, Drake, becomes angry and resents Joe's arrogance, but Joe tells him that arrogance is part of being a fighter. Moody tries to save the situation by suggesting that he take Drake out for a drink. Drake reluctantly agrees and goes out. Lewis tells Joe that he likes him, then asks Moody about his wedding plans. Knowing that Joe didn't know about the plans, Moody tells Lewis that the wedding's going ahead on Sunday. Moody, Roxy and Lewis leave for the bar across the street.

Joe asks Tokio when Moody got the divorce. Tokio tells him it was a few weeks ago, then urges Joe to forget Lorna, advising him to find someone to love since his fighting is fueled by hate and that a man who only lives on hate is half a man. Joe tells him to mind his own business. Tokio leaves just as Lorna comes in with newspapers featuring articles about Joe. After a bit of small talk and a lot of silence, Joe offers his congratulations, then suddenly grabs Lorna and demands that when he speaks to her she look at him. She breaks his grip and the two have a fierce argument about why she's marrying Moody, why Joe has been silent for the last few months, and how he's changed. Lorna tells him it's like looking in the face of a killer like Fuseli, that he's killed and buried the sweet boy "with the generous face." Joe shouts abusively at her, but just then Fuseli enters with packages of new clothes. Lorna leaves.

Fuseli shows Joe some new shirts, saying that Siggie drove the cab that brought him from the office. He asks whether Joe ever sees his family any more. Joe tells him angrily that he's tired of having people around him all the time. Fuseli calmly uses the phone to take bets on the fight and, confident that Joe will win, calls him the golden boy and reminds him that he owes him a lot. Joe goes out without the shirts, and as he goes, Fuseli takes another bet.

Act 3, Scene 1 Analysis

The reporters represent two aspects of public reaction to people who succeed at living the American Dream and become rich and famous. Drake represents the desire to bring such successful people down, something that continues to be a common trait in success oriented societies - even today as exemplified in the public and media frenzies over the Michael Jackson trial, for example. Lewis represents the opposite point of view, the respect people have for people who have worked hard, fought hard, and achieved much - respect that exists no matter how arrogant they have become.

The scene with the reporters and the scene with Tokio tell us two important things. Firstly it suggests that Joe is even more arrogant than before and that he's embraced the fighting mindset completely. It also suggests the possibility that his aggression both in the ring and out is a release for his lingering feelings, both love and resentment, about Lorna.

This suggestion is born out by the intensity of his feelings in their scene together, another verbal boxing match. Lorna's feelings match Joe's in angry intensity, which suggests they're both feeling trapped by their situations and both still feeling a lot of pain about what happened between them. When Lorna leaves and Fuseli comes in, however, we see clearly just how trapped Joe is actually feeling. Because Fuseli represents the attraction of money and success, his appearance and Joe's reaction combine to make the thematic statement that choosing money and fame rather than genuine happiness leads to despair and desperation. This desperation increases for both Joe and Lorna in the next scene, which in turn leads to the tragic ending of the play.

For the first time we hear the phrase golden boy in reference to Joe, spoken here by Fuseli. This is a deeply ironic term suggesting that in spite of all his financial success and public acclaim, his golden-ness, he's still a child and his true happiness remains unfulfilled.

Act 3, Scene 2

Act 3, Scene 2 Summary

Back in the locker room, we hear the sounds of a fight, the roar of the crowd and the ringing of the bell. Lorna waits nervously. Fuseli comes in and tells her to get out of Joe's life. When she reminds him she's marrying Moody, Fuseli tells her that Joe's fighting badly and it's all because of her. As the crowd roars for a knockout, he says that if it hadn't been for Joe and the fact that it would have spooked him even worse, she'd have been dead long ago. Once again he refers to Joe as the golden boy and threatens to kill her, but at that moment Joe, Tokio, Moody, and Roxy come in.

Moody goes to Lorna as Joe gets Eddie to calm down. Lorna asks what happened in the ring and Roxy tells her that Joe knocked out the Chocolate Drop. Joe sits, exhausted. Tokio rubs him down as Roxy describes the fight. Joe suddenly sits up and shouts that he feels like he can take on the whole world.

A ring official comes in and asks to see Joe's gloves. He examines them quickly and goes out, saying that the Chocolate Drop is dead. Tokio reassures a shocked Joe that he fought a clean fight. Fuseli tells Moody to go out and check the situation but before Moody can leave the Chocolate Drop's manager rushes in and shouts hysterically that Joe killed his fighter. Moody tries to hold him back but he threatens Joe. This makes Fuseli go for him. Joe tells Fuseli to calm down. Fuseli backs off, and the manager goes out. Fuseli gets everybody to leave Joe by himself and tries to get Lorna to go, but she stays and tries to comfort him.

Joe tells her he realizes that he's not only killed a man, he's killed himself. Lorna convinces him that there's still hope. Since they love each other they can go away and build a life together based on real happiness, not the false happiness offered by the boxing ring. She tells him they can leave tonight, in his car, and he excitedly agrees, saying that driving fast in that car is real freedom, real power and real happiness. He hurriedly cleans out his locker.

Act 3, Scene 2 Analysis

Once again the background sounds illuminate the confrontations of the moment, but in addition to highlighting the confrontation between Fuseli and Lorna (in which we see how much of a killer Fuseli can be), the sounds represent the confrontation between Joe and his decision to be a fighter. The fight with the Chocolate Drop and the Drop's death represents Joe's fight with his dream of being a musician and the death of that dream. Joe realizes this in his conversation with Lorna, making this scene the play's climax as Joe comes face to face with the consequences of his choice, and at Lorna's suggestion takes action to change the situation.

Lorna comes to a similar realization, that she's also killed a part of herself by sticking with the idea of marrying Moody. She sees freedom and happiness for both of them in taking off and starting a new life somewhere else. What she and Joe don't realize is that they're ironically basing all of their plans for happiness on the most potent symbol of the destructive power of money-inspired ambition in the play ... Joe's car.

Act 3, Scene 3

Act 3, Scene 3 Summary

Later that night at the Bonaparte home, everybody waits for news. Fuseli, Moody, Roxy and Siggie have been drinking and continue drinking, while Bonaparte stares out the window. Frank sits quietly, a bandage on his head. Moody is on the phone, checking to hear whether anybody's heard from Joe or Lorna. Siggie drunkenly proclaims that it's time to celebrate, that with this fight Joe has hit the big leagues. Bonaparte calmly protests that there's nothing to celebrate in the death of another human being, but accepts a glass of wine. Fuseli complains about Bonaparte as Moody rejoins the party, having heard nothing from either Lorna or Joe.

Fuseli asks why Frank wears a bandage, and Frank tells him he got it fighting alongside striking union workers. Fuseli comments that Frank has a good build for a fighter but Frank says he's happy where he is, fighting fights that are important to him.

Moody finally realizes that Lorna's not coming back to him. Fuseli offers to buy out his share of Joe, but Moody refuses. Bonaparte suggests that after tonight Joe might not fight any more. Fuseli angrily tells him to be quiet, but just as angrily Bonaparte tells him he's got every right to be worried for Joe's welfare. Roxy, genuinely puzzled, asks why Bonaparte can't see that this is the turning point in Joe's career. From now on he'll be worth a fortune.

The phone rings and Moody answers it, convinced it's Lorna and Joe. When he hears that the call is for Bonaparte he turns the phone over to Frank and happily reminds Fuseli that everybody in America has the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. He goes on to say that everybody in America is doing their best but that he's just a killer. Frank suddenly turns and calls them all killers, saying that Joe and Lorna were killed in a car crash, and the authorities need Bonaparte to identify Joe's body. Moody suddenly breaks down in tears when he realizes that Lorna's probably dead as well, but Bonaparte responds with dignity. He tells Frank they have to bring Joe home, where he belongs.

Act 3, Scene 3 Analysis

The brief exchange between Fuseli and Frank contrasts vividly with Joe's situation. Frank has gotten hurt fighting for something he believes in, while Joe has gotten hurt and caused a lot of hurt in the name of something he did for fame and money. This contrast is another way in which Joe's dream, the wrong kind of American Dream, is hollow and ultimately unrewarding.

This idea is further illustrated when Moody quotes the Declaration of Independence. In his mind he's telling Fuseli that he has just as much right to make money from Joe as he does. In the context of the play, however, his quote is deeply ironic. The quote

reinforces the idea that by pursuing the wrong kind of happiness in the wrong way, life, liberty and happiness are the last things that result.

This, in turn, is illustrated by the piece of information that comes next, that Joe and Lorna are dead. On one level their death is ironic because it occurs while they're escaping to freedom in a symbol of the dangers of living a false life. This means that their deaths could be seen as tragic. On another level Bonaparte's final reference to bringing Joe back where he belongs suggests that there's the possibility for redemption and triumph in his death. Even though he's dead, Joe is finally free of the society that he hated so much, the society represented by Fuseli, Moody, Roxy and their respective kinds of greed. He's said right from the beginning of the play that freedom from that society is all he ever wanted. Now in death he's got what he's wanted - but at a terrible cost.

Characters

Anna

Anna is Joe's sister and Siggie's wife. Anna's marriage is filled with love and devotion, and she and her husband frequently get into spirited fights. Anna plays the maternal role for Joe, in place of their deceased mother. When Joe is leaving for his first fighting tour, Anna helps him pack and instructs him on what types of clothes he needs to buy in the city.

Barker

Barker is the manager of the Baltimore Chocolate Drop and is distraught when Joe kills his boxer.

Frank Bonaparte

Frank Bonaparte is Joe's older brother and a labor union representative for the Congress of Industrial Organizations. His role in fighting for what he believes in sharply contrasts with Joe's choice to fight for money.

Joe Bonaparte

Joe Bonaparte, known only as "Boy" in the first part of the first scene, is a talented violinist, who trades his musical dream for the chance to pursue a life of fame and fortune in boxing. In the beginning the fight promoter, Moody, loses his best fighter, Kaplan, on the day of a fight when Kaplan breaks his hand on Joe's elbow. Joe lobbies to take Kaplan's place, and is proud when he is not knocked out, although his family, particularly his father, is distraught when Joe says he is considering a fighting career. Joe continues to box, but he is torn between the violin and boxing, a fact that is evident in the ring—where he is noticeably pulling his punches to protect his hands. When Joe's father reveals this fact to Joe's managers, Moody and Roxy, and his trainer, Tokio, the three try to manipulate Joe into giving up his dreams of music. When this fails, Moody sends his girlfriend, Lorna Moon, to try to seduce Joe away from his old life. Joe, smitten with Lorna and craving the rich lifestyle of a boxer, reluctantly agrees. He rapidly improves his fighting technique, to the delight of his managers and the horror of his father.

However, since Joe alienates his family, he rarely sees his father. When he does see him, Mr. Bonaparte is a constant reminder of Joe's old life. Because of this, Eddie Fuseli, a gambler, gangster, and one of Joe's new managers, tells Mr. Bonaparte to leave Joe's dressing room before a fight. Nevertheless, when Joe breaks his hand during a fight, a sign that he is now committed to his boxing career, Mr. Bonaparte is

there to see it. Joe's immersion into the world of boxing is swift after this, and it is not long before he has exchanged his shy, sensitive personality for a cocky attitude and a murderous hate. This hate is fueled both by his childhood—where he was picked on a lot for his flamboyant name and crossed eyes—and by his scorned love for Lorna Moon. Joe spends money on materialistic possessions like a sports car, and begins to dress like Fuseli. When he tries to leave the boxing life, Fuseli threatens him. However, after Joe accidentally kills the Baltimore Chocolate Drop in the ring, he realizes that he is not the man he used to be. Lorna, engaged to Moody but now claiming her love for Joe, says they can start life fresh, and she and Joe speed away into the night in his sports car. Both are killed in a car accident.

Mr. Bonaparte

Mr. Bonaparte is Joe's Italian father, whom Joe alienates when he starts to get famous because of his boxing career. Mr. Bonaparte is a cheery old man who is hard to upset. He lives his life by values learned in his native Italy, which stress integrity and following one's nature. His distinctive Italian accent is a constant reminder of his origins. He believes that Joe is meant to be a great violinist, and encourages his son to follow this path. When the play starts, Mr. Bonaparte refuses to buy his son-in-law a taxicab, but gladly spends twelve hundred dollars, on a new violin for Joe's birthday. When Mr. Bonaparte finds out that Joe is thinking of leaving his music career to fight, he holds off on giving Joe his present, although he eventually does. Joe, after playing the violin briefly, makes his decision to fight and gives the violin back to his father.

Joe's actions upset the normally unflappable Mr. Bonaparte, who refuses to give Joe his blessing to fight. Mr. Bonaparte asks Lorna Moon to watch out for Joe, and to give him an update on whether Joe is planning on giving up music totally. As Joe progresses in his boxing career, he alienates his entire family, including his father, who eventually comes to see one of Joe's boxing matches. He sadly gives Joe his blessing to fight. When Mr. Bonaparte sees the broken and deformed knuckles of another boxer in the dressing room, he realizes that if Joe's hands get hurt, he will never be able to go back to his music career. Shortly after that, Joe breaks a hand. When Joe kills the Baltimore Chocolate Drop, he is worried what his father will think. Although his father is sad for the dead boxer, he is even more distraught when he finds out Joe has died in a car accident. However, he pulls himself together to go claim his son's dead body and bring it home.

Boy

See Joe Bonaparte

Mr. Carp

Mr. Carp is Mr. Bonaparte's pessimistic friend, who often backs up his gloomy statements with quotes from the German philosopher, Arthur Schopenhauer. Mr. Carp

thinks all professional sports are pointless. His pessimism is sharply contrasted with Mr. Bonaparte's optimism. Joe gets some of his education by reading Mr. Carp's encyclopedia.

Drake

Drake is one of two sports writers whom Moody has Joe talk to the night before his fight with the Chocolate Drop. Unlike Lewis, the other sports writer, Drake is disgusted by Joe's cockiness.

Driscoll

Driscoll is the person who comes into the dressing room to examine Joe's gloves for tampering, after Joe kills the Chocolate Drop in his second fight with the boxer.

Eddie Fuseli

Eddie Fuseli is a notorious, homosexual Italian gangster, who is heavily involved in gambling, and who buys a piece of Joe's management. Although Joe's other managers, Tom Moody and Roxy Gottlieb, do not want to sell any of their share to Fuseli, they are intimidated by his violent reputation. Also, when Fuseli says to leave it up to Joe to decide who is going to manage him, Joe is indifferent, and Fuseli takes this as his cue to force his way into the partnership. When Fuseli first introduces himself to Joe, he invokes their shared Italian heritage and says that he wants to see Joe with the championship title. He says that he does not care about money, and just wants to help Joe out, which he can do with his good connections. However, the day before Joe is getting ready to fight the Chocolate Drop, Joe expresses his desire to leave the boxing life. At this point, Fuseli loses his tender demeanor with Joe and threatens him, saying that he owes a lot to Fuseli. In addition, in the same conversation, Joe watches as Fuseli calmly places thousands of dollars worth of bets on Joe, through different bookies, thus proving his desire for monetary gain. At this point, although Joe is having thoughts about leaving the boxing business, he has become too much a part of the materialistic side of it, to the point where he has started dressing like Fuseli. The gangster displays his violent side on several occasions, most notably when anybody tries to disrupt Joe's concentration before a fight.

Roxy Gottlieb

Roxy Gottlieb is one of the partners who manages Joe. In the beginning, Roxy, like Moody and the others, does not believe that Joe will ever be a great fighter, but they are desperate and take Joe on anyway. When Moody, Roxy, and Tokio are trying to discreetly persuade Joe into giving up music for boxing, Roxy is the one who gives away the fact that they are trying to manipulate Joe. Although Roxy likes the money that Joe is bringing in, he along with Moody, is very disparaging about Joe whenever Joe

does not do what they want. He is worried that Joe's purchase of a fast car is a dangerous risk, and this proves to be right when Joe dies in a car accident at the end of the play.

Lewis

Lewis is one of two sports writers whom Moody has Joe talk to the night before his fight with the Chocolate Drop, and is one of the few who admires Joe's cockiness. Lewis is also the one who mentions Moody's upcoming wedding to Lorna, which is news to Joe.

Mickey

Mickey is Pepper White's manager, who tries to discourage Pepper from pursuing his affair with a married woman.

Tom Moody

Tom Moody is Joe's initial fight manager and the fiancé of Lorna Moon. Moody is a man in his forties who used to manage all of the great professional boxers. He is distraught when he hears from Joe the day of a fight that Moody's best boxer, Kaplan, has broken his hand while training with Joe. Moody is even more disturbed when Joe pressures him to let Joe fight in Kaplan's place, but is happy when Joe is not knocked out. However, after several fights, Moody realizes that Joe is holding back in the ring by pulling his punches. When Joe's father tells Moody that it is because Joe is a violinist and is afraid of hurting his hands, Moody is happy again, thinking that he can manipulate Joe into giving up his dream of being a musician. Like the other managers, Moody sees Joe as an object to be obtained and used. To this end, he instructs his girlfriend, Lorna Moon, to seduce Joe away from his old life and into the boxing life. This works, and Joe steadily devotes himself to boxing, in the process developing a cocky attitude. This does not sit well with Moody, who starts to wish Joe would lose a fight, even though it would cut into Moody's profits. At the same time, Moody is forced to give up some of his profits when Eddie Fuseli, a gambler and gangster, coerces Moody into selling a share of Joe's management.

Lorna's seductions work all too well on Joe, who falls in love with her. Although Lorna feels the same about Joe and says that she will tell Moody she is leaving him, she cannot do it at first. Moody is a desperate man and tells Lorna that he would be lost without her. Lorna is struck by this vulnerability and renounces her intention to leave Moody, although she later tells Moody that she loves Joe. Lorna's inability to leave Moody enrages Joe, and the love triangle creates much animosity between Joe and Moody. At one point, Moody is so sick of Joe that he offers to sell his entire management portion to Fuseli, although he does not end up doing this. The fight with the Baltimore Chocolate Drop is the night before Moody's planned wedding to Lorna, who dies with Joe in a car accident.

Lorna Moon

Lorna Moon is Tom Moody's fiancée, although she is in love with Joe. When Joe first introduces himself to Moody and tries to get Moody to let him fight for him, Lorna encourages Joe to keep pressuring Moody. Although Lorna is very perceptive, Moody and his partners are very chauvinistic to her, often kicking her out of the office when she tries to give her opinion. However, once Moody realizes that Joe is struggling with his decision to give up the violin, Moody appeals to Lorna to use her feminine charms to seduce Joe away from his home life and musical dreams. Although Lorna starts out trying to do just this, she eventually falls in love with Joe. However, when she sees what her leaving would do to Moody, she fails to acknowledge her love for Joe, a fact that inspires hate in Joe, which he uses to win in the boxing ring. Lorna has come from a bad home life, where her father beat her mother repeatedly and her mother committed suicide. As a result, Lorna drinks heavily on many occasions. When she meets Moody, he helps pull her out of poverty, a fact that influences her decision to scorn Joe and stay with Moody.

However, Lorna is torn by her decision, and confesses her love for Joe to Moody, after Joe is not around to hear it. This fact does not impede Moody's engagement to Lorna, an event that further enrages Joe. From this point on, most conversations between Joe and Lorna are heated, and Lorna is the one who tells Joe that he is turning into a killer, which turns out to be a prophetic line when Joe kills the Chocolate Drop. Fuseli sees the effect that Lorna is having on Joe and tries to keep her away from him. In the end, however, Lorna is the only one who understands the pain that Joe is going through after killing a man. They leave together in Joe's car and drive into the night, intending to leave their respective lives behind. However, Lorna and Joe are killed in a car accident in the process.

Siggie

Siggie is Joe's brother-in-law and Anna's husband. Although he pleads with his father-in-law, Mr. Bonaparte, to buy him a taxicab, Mr. Bonaparte will not. Siggie is frustrated because he wants to open his own taxicab business instead of driving a cab for a company, where he will never make enough money to get ahead in life. He has a passionate relationship with his wife Anna, and the two although sometimes combative, are very loving.

Tokio

Tokio is Joe's trainer, and is one of the few people outside of Joe's family who shows genuine concern for Joe's feelings. When Moody and Roxy are trying to get down on Joe for pulling his punches, Tokio defends Joe, saying that he is developing into a great boxer. Tokio uses soothing language in the dressing room to calm Joe down, and is generally the most relaxed out of all of the men involved in the handling of Joe. As such, Joe claims that Tokio is one of the only people who understands him.

Pepper White

Pepper White is a boxer who tries to pick a fight with Joe in their shared dressing room. Pepper is eight years older than Joe—old for a boxer—and is not very smart. This fact is evidenced by the argument that erupts with his manager when he thinks the twelve hundred dollars the manager has promised him is lower than the thousand dollars he usually collects for a fight. Pepper shows Mr. Bonaparte his busted knuckles, and Mr. Bonaparte realizes that if Joe continues boxing, his hands will be useless for music. Pepper is having an affair with a married woman.

Themes

The Arts versus Materialism

When the play starts out, Joe is a talented musician whose dream is to play beautiful violin music. To this end, Joe's father, Mr. Bonaparte, secretly buys a very expensive violin for his son's birthday. Mr. Bonaparte's friend, Mr. Carp, plays the pessimist asking: "could a boy make a living playing this instrument in our competitive civilization today?" Mr. Bonaparte's response illustrates the idea that art and financial success do not always go hand in hand: "Don't expect for Joe to be a millionaire. He don't need it, to be millionaire." However, Joe has other plans. When he announces to his family that he is going to fight, he says it is for money: "I'm good—I went out to earn some money and I earned! I had a professional fight tonight—maybe I'll have some more." But the decision is not this easy for Joe. Although he does become a boxer, he holds back during his first several fights, afraid to hurt his hands and forever lose music as a possible career. When Mr. Bonaparte goes to visit Joe's managers to find out how he is doing, Roxy tells him of their intentions: "We want to make your boy famous—a millionaire, but he won't let us—won't cooperate." This phrase, "a millionaire," echoes Mr. Bonaparte's earlier comment to Mr. Carp.

Once the managers find out from Mr. Bonaparte that Joe is afraid to break his hands for fear of not playing the violin again, they step up pressure on him and Lorna tries to talk Joe into fighting. Joe, seduced in part by the idea of fast cars and other material possessions, decides to fight. However, when Joe asks his father for his blessing to fight, Mr. Bonaparte does not give it and says "Be careful fora your hands!" Yet in the end, Joe's hands are injured. In the fourth scene of the second act, Joe is in the dressing room with his father after a fight. "Better cut it off," Joe tells his trainer, indicating that his hand is broken. Joe is proud of his broken hand, which signals his total conversion into the fighting life, and says, "Hallelujah!! It's the beginning of the world!" With a broken hand, Joe will no longer have the dexterity in his fingers necessary to play the violin.

Although Joe accepts this fact with glee, later he regrets his decision. He tries to leave the boxing world before his last fight, but Fuseli stops him with a threat. However, after he kills the Baltimore Chocolate Drop in the ring, Joe realizes that he has strayed far from his original artistic intentions. In the dressing room after the fight, Joe tells Lorna: "Lorna, I see what I did. I murdered myself, too!" Although Lorna suggests that he give up the fighting business and "go back to your music," Joe is distraught: "But my hands are ruined. I'll never play again!" Lorna and Joe try to escape in his fast car, but the car, a symbol of the materialism that killed the artistic boy inside him, now literally kills Joe and Lorna when they get in a car accident. There is no going back on Joe's decision to abandon his music career.

Violence

The play is saturated with violence. In addition to the obvious references during the preparation for the boxing matches, and the deaths of both Joe and the Chocolate Drop, Odets includes several other episodes of violence. In the third scene of the first act, Roxy notes that Joe has been pulling his punches in the ring, and that the crowd does not like him as a result. Says Roxy: "He's a clever boy, that Bonaparte, and speedy—but he's first-class lousy in the shipping department!" The crowd likes to see brutality, not technique or fancy footwork, and when Joe does not deliver this to them, they do not like him. However, later in the play, after Joe has transformed himself into a brutal boxer, the stage directions note during his fight that "*The roar of* THE CROWD *mounts up and calls for a kill.*"

In addition to the boxing crowds, violence is expressed in other ways. Siggie and his wife, Anna, beat each other; Frank, Joe's brother, gets injured in a labor strike; and Fuseli, a notorious gangster, threatens violence often, as when he warns Moody not to pick on Joe: "It would be funny if your arms got broke." Later in the play, Joe tells Fuseli that "You use me like a gun!" another reference to Fuseli's violent tendencies. When Fuseli thinks Lorna is distracting Joe and making him lose a fight, he tries to kick her out of Joe's dressing room. When she does not move quick enough, the stage directions note the following: "*Completely enraged and out of control,* EDDIE *half brings his gun out from under his left armpit.*" If Joe had not stopped him, he might have killed Lorna.

Shame

Besides money and possessions, Joe also chooses to fight out of shame. He is ashamed about being poor, but his shame goes deeper than that. Joe is cross eyed, a fact that he is embarrassed about and one which other characters mention constantly. When Moody does not want to let Joe fight in the beginning, he says: "You're brash, you're fresh, you're callow—and you're cock-eyed! In fact, you're an insult to my whole nature!" When Moody later laughs at Joe because of his eyes, Joe tells him "I don't like it. . . . I don't want you to do it," and grabs Moody as if he is going to hit him. Joe's cross-eyed condition is immediately plastered in the headlines of the newspapers after his fight, as Frank notes: "Flash: Chocolate Drop fails to K.O. new cock-eyed wonder." This undue attention to Joe's eyes has plagued him since he was a kid, as he notes to Lorna: "People have hurt my feelings for years. I never forget." Joe's eyes are not the only thing that have made him feel ashamed over the years. As he notes to Lorna, "Even my name was special—Bonaparte." This flamboyant name plagues Joe, because it reminds people of the famous French dictator, Napoleon Bonaparte. Several people make fun of this name including Drake, one of the newspaper reporters, who says: "Bonaparte, I'll watch for Waterloo with more than interest!" a reference to the famous battle that Napoleon lost.

Style

Social Drama

Odets earned his fame through the social dramas of his early career which openly advocated that the masses fight for their rights by participating in strikes or other protests. Although later plays like *Golden Boy* are not as overt in their references, some critics still consider these plays social dramas, in part because they share the same spirit as the earlier plays. For example, in *Golden Boy*, Joe is afraid of poverty, a common social problem during the 1930s, the depression years when the play takes place. When Joe is explaining his reasons for wanting to fight, he tells his father: "Do you think I like this feeling of no possessions?" Joe sees boxing as a much more promising way to get out of the poverty in which he and his family live, and as a result is willing to sacrifice his dream of music. This tragic decision underscores the plight of the working class, which often has no choice but to follow money and not dreams.

The play has other references to social issues, such as the problems between labor unions and industry management. Frank, Joe's brother, is an organizer for the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), who must leave often to help settle disputes between striking workers and their management. As Frank notes when he is first introduced, "There's hell down there in textiles," referring to a strike that is happening in a textile company in the South. In the last scene of the play, the stage directions note that Frank sits with "*a bandage around his head.* "Later in the scene, after Fuseli mentions it, Siggie, Frank's brother-in-law, tells Fuseli that "They gave it to him in a strike." The "They" is most likely referring to hired thugs, police, or the National Guard, all groups that were called in to break up strikes, with violence, if necessary. Odets's use of these images and dialogue is a clear indication that he is trying to send a social message about the labor problems in his time.

Language

Critics have often commented on Odets's command of language. In most of his plays, characters speak in realistic, distinct ways. This play is no different. The most distinctive use of language is the Italian accent and halted speech of Joe's father, Mr. Bonaparte. From the moment Joe's father is introduced, the stage directions indicate that he "*talks with an Italian accent.*" In addition to this, his speech is often shortened from that used in normal English, such as when he says, "I don't go in taxicab business." Normally, somebody speaking English would say, "I don't want to go into the taxicab business." Mr. Bonaparte also tends to add extra letters onto some of his words, and uses word constructions in different ways. For example, in another example from the same scene, Mr. Bonaparte says "I don't expects for Joe to drive taxi." Once again, the extra "s" on the end of the word "expect," coupled with the use of the word, "for," in an awkward way, gives Joe's father a distinctive, foreign style of speech, even without the accent. While others in the play outside of Joe's family make fun of Mr. Bonaparte's speech, his

language is important. It serves as a vivid reminder of the old world values of Italy, which contrast sharply with the capitalistic values of America. In addition to Mr. Bonaparte, Odets manipulates language in other ways, such as the gangster-style street talk of Fuseli.

Foreshadowing

In the play, Odets makes use of some very overt foreshadowing techniques which plant clues that tip the reader off to what may happen in the future. The foreshadowing shows up most clearly in two deaths—Joe and the Baltimore Chocolate Drop. In the very first scene, Moody talks to Lorna about "Cy Webster who got himself killed in a big, red Stutz." The reference to the dead boxer on its own may not let the reader know that Joe is going to die, but it is backed up by several other references. In the fourth scene of the first act, Joe goes on at length to Lorna about how he wants a fast car, saying that: "Those cars are poison in my blood," and "Gee, I like to stroke that gas!" In addition to this, there are several other references to fast cars, speeding, and the danger that is involved, most of which are said by Joe's managers. Says Moody: "But you and your speeding worries me!" As a result of these and other references, Joe's death by an automobile accident in his fast car should come as no surprise since the thought of that ending has been built up in the reader's mind from the beginning of the play.

The other major death in the play, the death of the Chocolate Drop in the boxing ring, is also foreshadowed, although not as overtly as Joe's death. The play itself builds on its violence, getting increasingly more brutal as it goes on. This is an indication that the ultimate example of violence, killing, may be coming. However, Fuseli also offers a direct reference to murder in the fourth scene of the second act, when he tells Joe to: "Go out there and kill Lombardo! Send him out to Woodlawn! Tear his skull off!" These references to death and burial foreshadow the eventual death of the Chocolate Drop, whom Joe kills at the end of the play.

Historical Context

The Great Depression

Although the exact causes of the Great Depression are still debated, most historians agree that the Stock Market Crash of 1929 helped to usher in this huge economic downturn. However, as the country began to sink financially, President Herbert Hoover, along with many others, thought that the crisis was temporary. Unfortunately, the situation only got worse. This fact, coupled with Hoover's unyielding stance in not providing federal public aid to individuals, meant that an increasing number of individuals and families were losing their jobs. Starvation became a real issue, and crowds of men would gather around the backs of restaurants, fighting over food scraps in the garbage. The suicide rate steadily rose, and millions of families left their homes to try to find work. In many cases these migrant families would set up shelters on vacant lots in other cities and towns; groups of these shelters came to be known as Hoovervilles.

Boxing in the 1930s

Many people sought relief from the horrors of everyday life in the depression through escapist activities like going to the movies or sporting events, when they could afford them. In such depressed times, sports franchises had to come up with increasingly more sensational events to get people to watch their matches. This was especially true with boxing which at the time was second in popularity only to baseball. In 1935, Joe Louis, a young African-American boxer who had stormed through the amateur ranks, signed a large contract—signaling a new era of wealth for boxers. Louis energized the professional boxing scene as he fought his way to become the world heavyweight champion in 1937. Louis, also known as the Brown Bomber, had real crowd appeal, and his fights helped to sell many tickets. In 1938, in a symbolic match against Max Schmeling of Germany—a member of the Nazi Party—Louis won in front of eighty thousand fans at Yankee Stadium.

Roosevelt and the New Deal

While people tried to escape their problems through movies and sporting events, however, the nation's economy continued to plummet. By 1933, the country was faced with an unusually high unemployment rate of nearly twenty-five percent. On March 4, 1933, with the inauguration of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the American people had new hope. Roosevelt, who had campaigned and won on the promise to help build America's economy and get people jobs, had a big job to do, and he wasted no time. In his first three months of office, dubbed the Hundred Days by the newspapers, Roosevelt worked with Congress to pass an unprecedented amount of legislation. This legislation was designed to help shore up and rebuild the nation's weakened economy

and work force. The wealth of programs that resulted from this legislation was collectively known as the New Deal.

Roosevelt and the Labor Issue

One of the areas that Roosevelt had a particular interest in was labor, and several of his early legislative acts addressed the problems of both putting people to work and making sure they were treated fairly. Through the 1933 National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA), Roosevelt guaranteed collective bargaining for employees, which led to the establishment of unions in many industries. Although unions had been around in the past, they were often controlled by business and therefore not always committed to representing workers' rights. As part of the NIRA, Roosevelt established the National Recovery Administration (NRA), which tried to stabilize prices and wages. However, in 1935 the NIRA was ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, and the NRA was disbanded. When this happened, the NRA safeguards, particularly minimum wages and maximum hours for workers, were largely ignored by businesses once again.

Labor Unrest

These two issues, wages and hours, took center stage in the labor movement in the 1930s. Labor unions, which had been steadily increasing in political and bargaining power throughout the decade, began to clash more frequently with industry. Many new union members were recent immigrants, who had already seen discrimination both in their work-place and in society, so they were primed for a fight. However, the unions themselves were experiencing some division. In 1934 and 1935, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), a controlling body for many of the older unions—which were organized by skill or craft—was forced to recognize many of the newer unions—which were organized by industry or workplace. As a result, the AFL set up the Committee for Industrial Organization to address the needs of these industry workers. However, the Committee chose to split off on its own and form a new organization, eventually known as the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). In the play, Joe's brother, Frank, is a union organizer for the CIO.

Still, despite this division between AFL and CIO, the major conflict was between the unions and industry management. In the mid-1930s, this conflict often took the form of strikes, where workers would refuse to work until their demands were met. These workers would often march around the outside of their company, holding up picket signs. A common retaliation from the company was to hire temporary replacement workers, known as scabs, to help keep the company running. As a result, the most effective strike was the sit-down strike, in which workers would take over a company and barricade themselves inside, preventing scabs from coming in to replace them. Although these strikes—ultimately ruled unconstitutional—often led to violence between the strikers, industry management, hired thugs, police, and even the National Guard, they were extremely effective at getting management to settle contracts. In 1938, as part of the second wave of reform programs known as the Second New Deal, Roosevelt

signed the Fair Labor Standards Act, which established federal guidelines for the two hot issues—minimum wages and maximum hours.

The Onset of World War II

Debate still rages today on how much Roosevelt's sweeping reforms actually helped to end the depression. Most historians agree that, while these programs did help put some people back to work and shore up the economy—as well as establish many important agencies—it was the onset of World War II in Europe in 1939 that caused the economy to boom once again. As the massive wartime production effort swept through America, many of the unemployed found jobs once again, and the Great Depression was over.

Critical Overview

Odets's earliest politically charged plays like *Waiting for Lefty* (1935) and *Awake and Sing!* (1935), performed by the now famous Group Theatre, propelled Odets to overnight stardom. These two plays were well received by most critics for the gritty portrayal of what life was like for Americans during the Great Depression. In fact, many critics had high hopes for Odets's career as a social playwright.

Golden Boy signaled the start of the next phase of Odets's career, where he wrote plays that focused less on social criticism and more on psychology and personal relationships. Michael J. Mendelsohn, in his 1969 book, *Clifford Odets: Humane Dramatist,* notes this change, stating that: "In thus directing attention toward his central character, Odets considerably narrows his earlier focus." *Golden Boy* received mixed reviews from the critics when it debuted on Broadway in 1937. In his 1937 review in the *Nation,* critic Joseph Wood Krutch notes that: "There are moments when 'Golden Boy' seems near to greatness; there are others when it trembles on the edge of merely strident melodrama." Likewise, in her 1938 review in *Theatre Arts Monthly,* Edith J. R. Isaacs notes of Odets that: "He has, moreover, that gift of rhythmic speech which is the mark of the more-than-one play author," but says further that this is a gift that "Odets has not yet quite under control."

Much of the criticism of the play centered around Odets's personal life. *Golden Boy* was the first play that Odets wrote after returning from a Hollywood screenwriting job. Critics made much of Odets's decision to leave the New York theatre scene for Hollywood, which many saw as going against his earlier stance of protesting large, corporate organizations such as movie studios. However, Odets's move was financial, not political. He hoped to be able to support the Group Theatre—the independent theatre company that had produced his earlier plays—through his Hollywood salary. In fact, in "How a Playwright Triumphs," a 1966 *Harper's Magazine* article by Odets that was adapted from a 1961 interview, the playwright notes that this was particularly the case for *Golden Boy*, a fact that disturbed Odets. Says the playwright: "it seemed to me to be really immoral to write a play for money."

Because of this, critics have associated the main theme of *Golden Boy*—the struggle to choose between art and materialism—with Odets's own struggles as an artist. In 1963, Catharine Hughes notes in her *Commonweal* article that, "As much as the Joe Bonaparte of that play, he was constantly seeking to reconcile two worlds." And in 1970, Allan Lewis writes in his *American Plays and Playwrights of the Contemporary Theatre:* "Odets seemed troubled by success and his desertion of a cause. *Golden Boy* is his own story, raising the question of whether art and commerce mix."

Some critics even posed the idea that Odets's play, while on the surface a play about a young man's choice between music and boxing, was really an indictment of Hollywood. Says Gerald Peary in his article for the Winter 1986/1987 issue of *Sight and Sound:* "In *Golden Boy*, Odets, the insider, thumbed his nose at Hollywood." Peary says that Odets expected his readers to recognize Bonaparte's meteoric rise to the top as the structure

of a formulaic Hollywood movie, but notes that the play had a twist. Says Peary: "Odets mocked Hollywood with the downbeat off-screen deaths of Joe and Lorna, as intentionally unmotivated as the most tacked-on studio ending." In his 1962 book, *Clifford Odets,* R. Baird Shuman, like many critics, notes that "the author's Hollywood experience shows itself in the pat plot and characterization of the play." Shuman also notes that many critics have questioned the very premise of the story, asking "whether it is believable that a man with the sensitive hands of a violinist, could, in reality, become a successful boxer."

Still, most critics had at least some good things to say about the work, which became Odets's biggest commercial success. In its first run, *Golden Boy* played for 250 performances. In addition, Odets sold the movie rights for the play to Hollywood for $75,000, a move that allowed him to continue to provide financial support to the Group Theatre, at least for a time. However, while revivals of the play have been popular with audiences, critics have continued to offer mixed criticism, and many have focused on Odets's earliest plays, labeling them as propaganda pieces. As William W. Demastes notes in the entry on Odets in his 1995 book, *American Playwrights, 1880-1945: A Research and Production Sourcebook,* the challenge is to look past this: "Current Odets scholarship needs to continue directing itself to seeing Odets as more than a fire-brand of the 1930s." There is some evidence that, in recent years, critics have followed Demastes's advice, and Odets has once again been praised as an important playwright.

Criticism

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

Critical Essay #1

Poquette has a bachelor's degree in English and specializes in writing about literature. In the following essay, Poquette discusses Odets's use of violence and speed to set the stage for Joe's fateful end in Golden Boy.

In Odets's *Golden Boy*, Joe Bonaparte is a musician who decides to abandon his dream of music for fame and fortune in boxing. Even though Joe transforms himself into a killer, literally beating a man to death in the boxing ring, the sensitive, musical side of Joe cannot live with this fact. In the end, Joe's newfound lifestyle of speed and violence leads to his death as he tries to escape his life in the boxing business in a fast car and crashes as a result.

Odets's play is built to reflect and inspire this violent and speedy end to Joe's life. In fact, speed and violence act as twin turbines in the play. Once Joe has chosen to try the boxing life, these two forces propel him toward his fateful end. The play's structure itself reveals the emphasis on speed in the work. The play consists of twelve scenes total, with five in the first act, four in the second act, and three in the third act. With this decreasing number of scenes in the play, the pace of *Golden Boy* gets faster from act to act. The speed of the play is helped even further by the use of fade-outs, a type of transition between scenes or acts that works by fading the light until it is dark, as opposed to lowering the stage's curtain. The fade-out is a cinematic convention that creates a quicker transition between scenes or acts. Though the action only fades out for a short period of time, many of the scenes in the play jump forward in time by weeks or months when the light comes back on. This dizzying rush of time helps give the play its urgent quality.

Even Joe's decision to become a boxer is a quick one. Although he has been learning how to fight "These past two years, all over the city—in the gyms," Joe makes the decision to fight in Kaplan's place very quickly. When Kaplan is out with "a busted mitt" from hitting Joe's elbow, Joe immediately comes to see Moody. Both Joe and his family note the speed of this change. Says Joe, "Tomorrow's my birthday! I change my life!" Mr. Bonaparte, who is not used to moving this fast asks Joe: "Justa like that?" And his brother, Frank, asks him, "And what do you do with music?" Joe has trained his whole life to be a musician, so this drastic change appears sudden to his family.

From this point on, Joe's life is lived at breakneck speed. His decisions come fast and furious and the changes in Joe's character are equally quick. As the reader learns from the scene 3, which is two months later, Joe is having a problem with pulling his punches because he is afraid of hurting his hands. Because of this, Moody, Roxy, and Tokio try to convince him to give up the idea of being a musician and focus on boxing. When this does not work, Lorna says she will try, and has a long talk with Joe in the park. Although Joe is reluctant at first, he feels trapped by his desire for speed, the type created by large sports cars. He decides to give up his music career in part because "Those cars are poison in my blood." Says Joe, "When you sit in a car and speed you're looking down at the world. Speed, speed, everything is speed."

Following his decision to not pull his punches, Joe's life speeds up considerably in the second act. He goes on a road trip to gain some necessary fighting experience, gets hooked up with a third person to manage him (Fuseli), pledges his love to Lorna and then is cruelly turned down by Lorna in front of Moody. Each successive event alienates Joe a little more from his true nature (and his family), and speeds up the play. The third act is even quicker as the play builds to its climax.

Violence also plays a huge role in the play. The play starts on a violent note, as Moody and Lorna are in the middle of an argument in Moody's office. The first line of the play is an exclamation from Moody: "Pack up your clothes and go! Go! Who the hell's stopping you?" From this first line, the audience can tell they are in for a heated scene, and the argumentative dialogue that follows quickly draws the audience into the play. While Lorna says, "I feel like a tramp and I don't like it," referring to the fact that she wants Moody to leave his wife for her, she nevertheless does not have the strength to leave Moody. This idea of wanting to leave but feeling trapped or unable to go is an important precursor to Joe's own feeling of entrapment by Moody and the others. Like Joe, Lorna is stuck in her dependency on Moody and the boxing business that supports them. The only alternative is to try life on her own—a scary thought during the depression.

From this fight, which eventually subsides into loving talk and caresses, the scene progresses to Joe's entrance, which is sudden and unannounced. Joe does not even knock, a fact that Moody notes and which annoys Moody. Moody's annoyance stimulates another argument, this time between Joe—who asks Moody to let him fight—and Moody, who is irate at the fact that Joe keeps using his first name. "And who the hell are you to call me Tom? Are we acquainted?" Moody, although cordial enough to Joe when he thinks he can use him, is nevertheless quick to threaten him at the end of the scene, when he says, "Call me Tom again and I'll break your neck!!"

Violence is a way of life for many of the characters in the play, especially those who pursue a life in the boxing business. Since the majority of actual boxing matches take place off screen, Odets focuses the violence on the industry itself—specifically the conflicts that happen among the many handlers who are in charge of a boxing star. As the play goes on and Joe gets more and more entrenched in the lifestyle, the amount of violence in his life increases. Joe's own violent streak has always been there, built up since his childhood, as he indicates when he tells Lorna that people "have hurt my feelings for years." Although he is a musician, violence appeals to him as a way of fighting back against his past, and he openly says, "If music shot bullets I'd like it better." Mr. Bonaparte notes in the fourth scene of the second act that Joe's "gotta wild wolf inside—eat him up!" And in the same scene, Joe lunges at Pepper White, a boxer who taunts him with the phrase, "Where'd you ever read about a cock-eye champ?" The resulting fight that breaks out among Joe, Pepper, and their two trainers is short, mainly because at that instant, Fuseli walks in. As Odets notes, "*The fighting magically stops on the second.* "

The character of Fuseli is an interesting person for his extreme display of anger and violence, which has a large effect on Joe. When he first comes into the gymnasium, Roxy notes how he met Fuseli: "I remember this Eddie Fuseli when he came back from

the war with a gun. He's still got the gun and he still gives me goose pimples!" Fuseli is a very combative character, and one who becomes more so as the play continues on. When Joe and Moody get into a fight, Fuseli warns Moody, "You could get cut up in little pieces," among other threats. As Joe gets immersed more and more in the world of boxing, he tells Moody that "Eddie's the only one here who understands me." As the stage directions note later in the play when Fuseli walks into Moody's office, "*He and* Joe *are dressed almost identically.*" Through the help of the gangster, and because of his own loss of identity, Joe has started dressing like Fuseli. Joe is no longer the sensitive musician. Lorna notes this in the same scene: "When did you look in the mirror last? Getting to be a killer! You're getting to be like Fuseli!"

Lorna's words resonate with Joe, and he is in a bad mood when Fuseli starts talking about his upcoming fight, saying that it is going to be good. "How do you know?" Joe asks. This sparks a heated conversation between Fuseli and Joe, in which Joe talks about wanting to do other things besides boxing. Fuseli threatens him, saying that "You're in this up to your neck. You owe me a lot—I don't like you to forget. You better be on your toes when you step in that ring tomorrow night." Joe realizes that if he tries to leave, Fuseli will kill him. This threat of violence pushes him into his last fight, with the Chocolate Drop and Joe wins it. He tries to be happy at first, and easily talks about the fight in the dressing room afterwards. Says Joe, "I gave him the fury of a lifetime in that final punch!"

However, Joe soon learns that this is more true than he realized—he has killed the Chocolate Drop with his "final punch." With this event, Joe drops the macho persona that he had developed as a boxer and goes back to being a sensitive artist who cares about his family's input. "What will my father say when he hears I murdered a man?" he asks Lorna. Unfortunately, there is nothing that Joe can do about this. He knows that he has passed a point of no return. His hands are busted and unfit for music, his morality has been stained, and he has no desire to fight anymore. The only option left is to flee, and he and Lorna do this in his sports car. However, the twin forces of speed and violence that have propelled Joe to the point of murder do not stop now. In their attempt to get away from the violence, the speed of the sports car kills Joe and Lorna.

Source: Ryan D. Poquette, Critical Essay on *Golden Boy,* in *Drama for Students,* The Gale Group, 2003.

Critical Essay #2

In the following excerpt, Groman examines Odets's reflections on the various writers who were his inspiration.

Clifford Odets, for all of his adult life as a playwright and screenwriter, marveled at the gift of creativity, finding inspiration when that gift seemed within his grasp and enduring depression when it seemed beyond reach. His own experience operated as both a resource and an obstacle as he sought to resolve a number of personal crises—as a son whose father viewed his early acting and writing efforts with contempt, as a lover and husband whose stormy relationships ended in failure and bitterness, and as a creative artist whose need for privacy and discipline conflicted again and again with the temptations and demands of a public life and reputation. Yet whatever his own circumstances, Odets consistently sought fulfillment as a writer, viewing the creative act with reverence and continuing attention and finding in the efforts of others inspiration as well as validation for his own creative identity.

Even as a boy, Odets was drawn to writers of powerful imagination whose heroes struggled with questions of identity and self-realization through social action or artistic effort. As a teenager Odets read Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables,* a book to which he would invariably return and comment on with great affection. Indeed, in his 1940 journal, he called Hugo "the rich love of my boyhood days" and went on to describe *Les Misérables* as "the most profound art experience I have ever had." The French author, as Odets noted, influenced him in ways that were to affect his later life as a writer and political activist: "Hugo . . . inspired me, made me aspire; I wanted to be a good and noble man, longed to do heroic deeds with my bare hands, thirsted to be kind to people, particularly the weak and humble and oppressed. From Hugo I had my first feeling of social consciousness. He did not make me a romantic, but he heightened in me that romanticism which I already had. I loved him and love him still, that mother (*sic*) of my literary heart."

For a boy entering adolescence, Hugo's clear division of right and wrong, his demarcation of heroes and villains, and the endless pursuits of the relentless Inspector Javert must have met the young Odets's need for suspense and adventure. More important, ultimately, was Hugo's gallery of characters who were capable of heroism *and* sacrifice—the saintly Bishop of Digne, whose every action is devoted to those in need; Fantine, who sells her hair and even her teeth, hoping to preserve the life of her daughter; the young radical and romantic Marius Pontmercy, who gives up an inheritance on political principle; and the hero of heroes, the solitary convict Jean Valjean, who benefits from the Bishop's generosity and repays him by pursuing a life of good works despite enormous personal sacrifice.

Odets was to continue his search for mentors of powerful and wide-ranging vision, and in the American writers [Ralph Waldo] Emerson and [Walt] Whitman he found new inspiration and direction. As he wrote to Harold Clurman in 1932, it was the business-oriented Louis Odets, the writer's father, who first encouraged him to consider Emerson

seriously. Margaret Brenman Gibson quotes from this letter, in which Odets recalls his father leaving in his room "two volumes of a peculiar edition of Emerson 'made for business men.' In a gaily mocking account of this . . . (Odets) says, 'The devils quote and underline on every page glorious trumpet sounding maxims about success. They make Emerson the first Bruce Barton of his country. But I am reading with a clear brain and no interest in success.' Emerson is 'certainly the wisest American.'"

Reflecting further on Emerson's importance to him, Odets wrote in his 1932 journal, "I am glad that Emerson lived before I did. He has made life a richer thing for many (*sic*) of us. That is the function of all great men: that they reveal to us natural truths, ourselves and a realization of ourselves." Writing again in the same journal, he reflected on Emerson in a way that seemed to echo Hugo: "Emerson says somewhere that heroes are bred only in times of danger. I would add great artists are too bred in such times. Now I see the world is drifting into such times. I am waiting to see what heroes and artists will spring from the people."

Although Odets would come to share Emerson's belief that people are not fundamentally bad, he commented that few could or would rise to Emerson's call for "uncorrupted behavior." That he continued to brood over this loss of Emerson's faith in his fellow humans is amply demonstrated in his plays and elsewhere. Even near the end of his life, in a telecast interview, he would remember "what Emerson called 'uncorrupted behavior'" as a quality "with which all children are born . . . when nothing outside of yourself influences you, when you are in command of yourself with honor, without dishonesty, without lie, when you grasp and deal, and are permitted to deal, with exactly what's in front of you, in terms of your best human instincts."

To be sure, Odets could and did find many calls for "uncorrupted behavior" in Emerson's work and that of other writers but what he seems to have valued most in Emerson was his belief in the range of human potentialities despite the limitations of time, place, accident, or fate. It was Emerson who had emphasized in "Circles" that "there are no fixtures in nature. The universe is fluid and volatile," and in "Fate" that nature, rather than being limited to destructiveness, "solicits the pure in heart to draw on all its omnipotence." In "Circles" Emerson remarked that "the use of literature is to afford us a platform whence we may command a view of our present life, a purchase by which we may move it." Such statements were meant to clear the way to new horizons and did so for Odets and countless others.

Like Hugo and Emerson, Walt Whitman assumed heroic proportions for Odets, who even kept a plaster cast of the poet in his room. In 1940 he bought first editions of *November Boughs* and *Drum Taps,* as well as a collection of Whitman's letters to his mother. In 1947, when Odets's only son was born, he named him Walt Whitman Odets.

If the large-scale models of Emerson and Whitman were encouraging, Odets nevertheless understood that American life might bring forth artists of quite different scope and temperament. In conversations with the composer Aaron Copland at Dover Furnace, the Group Theatre's summer retreat, Odets came to grips with this issue. He noted that "today the artists are not big, full, epic, and Aaron shows what I mean. They

squeeze art out a thousandth of an inch at a time, and that is what their art, for the most part, lacks: bigness, vitality and health and swing and lust and charity . . ." Odets concludes by asserting, "there I go to Whitman again. Of course that's what we need, men of Whitman's size."

In another entry in the 1932 journal, Odets suggests that Whitman "roars in your ears all the time. When you swing your arms and the muscles flex, they are Whitman's muscles too." Elsewhere Odets celebrates not only the strength that may come with well-being but also the sexuality and autoeroticism that made Whitman famous and, in the nineteenth century, generally disreputable: "I think with love o (*sic*) Whitman's lines, something like, 'Oh the amplitude of the earth, and the coarseness (*sic*) and sexuality of it and the great goodness and clarity of it.' And I myself feel that way with love for people and the earth and women and dark nights and being together and close to naked women, naked as I am naked."

Eventually, Odets's excitement and passion would cool—a result of hard living, many personal and professional disappointments and, simply, aging. However, it may be that Whitman's imagery linked to a sense of purpose remained embedded in the playwright's consciousness, as suggested by a passage written a year before his death: "The whole fabric of my creative life I have built a room in which every corner there is a cobweb. They have mostly been swept away and I must begin again, *spinning out of myself* (italics mine) the dust and 'shroudness' of that room with its belaced and silent corners." The passage brings to mind Whitman's noiseless, patient spider involved in the act of creation, launching forth "filament, filament, filament, out of itself." Like the spider, the narrator's soul in the second verse of Whitman's poem (now personified) sends out "gossamer thread" to "catch somewhere," thereby hoping to end a pattern of isolation. If Odets, like the spider and soul of the poem, sought to reach out to others, he seemed also to be settling old scores here, undergoing a ritualistic purgation in a rather stifling atmosphere and, in doing so, readying himself for the task of creation, which Whitman's spider image so powerfully evokes.

Odet's search for heroic models extended to the musical world as well as to literature, and in the life and work of Ludwig van Beethoven he found a source of inspiration that was to last until his death. Odets listened to Beethoven's music frequently and intensively, wrote on Beethoven's importance as a creative artist and man of his time, and would sometimes self-consciously compare and contrast Beethoven's problems and solutions with his own. In his early attempts at fiction and drama, Odets used the maimed musician or composer as a central figure. Indeed, in his unproduced play *Victory* he carefully modeled the hero, Louis Brant, on Beethoven himself. In later years in Hollywood, Odets also planned a screenplay on the composer's life, but the project was never completed.

Beethoven's early poverty, his difficult social relationships (often with women), and his dedication to his art (despite hearing problems and eventual deafness) greatly moved Odets. And in looking at W. J. Turner's biography of the composer, which Odets read while writing *Victory*, he would find one acquaintance of Beethoven remarking of him "that he loved his art more than any woman" and "that he could not love any woman

who did not know how to value his art." Later, as Beethoven's hearing problems increased in severity and further isolated him, the composer thought of suicide but desisted, "art alone" restraining his hand. At other times he wrote of seizing "fate by the throat" to reach his goals. Clearly, for Odets, Beethoven was a truly courageous man and artist despite his personal difficulties.

Odets, in commenting on Beethoven's music, found the Eroica Symphony "an awesome and terrible piece of work' and his fourth piano concerto a composition in which the "characters of the orchestra never for a moment stop their exuberant conversation." As for Beethoven's Seventh Symphony, he noted, one must "be virgin of heart and spirit to write it. Beethoven did not lose the innocence," though ordinary mortals give it up simply "to survive." Odets's descriptions, quoted here, underscore the intensity of his feelings about Beethoven and sometimes suggest Emersonian parallels. They also indicate the kind of close thematic connections between music and literature the writer would make in his plays and films.

As Odets struggled with form, so did the Old Master, but Beethoven triumphed again and again. As Odets put it, "every time he found a form for his content he simultaneously found that his content had progressed in depth and a new form was necessary—a very Tantalus of life! He, however, had the hardheadedness to see it through to the bitter end—he obviously died looking for a new form—and he died having pushed music to a level which before had never been attained nor has yet been equalled. Great unhappy man!"

Finally, in Beethoven, Odets found a paradigm for the quintessential Romantic—a superman for all season—one who is "amazed, impressed, delighted, and enraged by the caprices of life." As Odets noted further, "It is the romantic who cries out that he is out of harmony with life—by which he means that life is not in harmony with his vision of it, the way he saw it as a youth with moral and idealistic hunger to mix his hands in it and live fully and deeply. The classic art is to accept life, the romantic to reject it as it is and attempt to make it over as he wants it to be." The man and his method were for Odets a means of perception, a symbol of hope, and possibly a basis for social action and change.

When we turn to Odets's own work, however, we find a curious paradox. The heroic models have disappeared, and in their place the protagonists of his plays respond at a primal level to a brutal, self-serving world; either they are (or become) corrupt or they are overwhelmed by an environment over which they have little or no control. Indeed, the America that Odets lived in and responded to was far different from the private and idealized world about which he wrote with such intensity and even affection and that he later abandoned with such regret. In *Waiting for Lefty,* Odets's first-produced and perhaps most well-known play, there is a rousing call for strike action by the rank and file of a taxi union after much indecision and argument. However, Lefty, the guiding spirit of the union, has already been murdered by unknown assailants, and even the ringing call to action at the end of the play suggests martyrdom as well as the benefits of solidarity. As Agate, one of the rallying strikers, puts it, "HELLO AMERICA! HELLO. WE'E STORMBIRDS OF THE WORKING-CLASS. WORKERS OF THE WORLD . . .

OUR BONES AND BLOOD! And when *we die* they'll know what we did to make a new world! *Christ, cut us up to little pieces. We'll die* for what is right! put fruit trees *where our ashes are!*" (My italics.)

In *Awake, and Sing!,* Odets's Depression-era play centered on an American-Jewish family in the Bronx, the Marxist Grandfather Jacob is ineffectual even in his own family and ends his life by suicide. His grandson Ralph Berger, who surrenders the insurance money Jacob had left him at his mother's insistence, will in all likelihood have little influence in times to come. As a number of critics have suggested, his optimism strikes a false note as he faces the future without a clear sense of purpose, training, or money. Indeed, as more than one character comes to understand, despite arguments to the contrary, life *is* "printed on dollar bills." The well-to-do Uncle Morty, a dress manufacturer, will continue to have the respect of Ralph's mother Bessie, he will continue to oppose strike action vigorously and probably successfully, and he will lead a personal life without personal responsibilities, sleeping with showroom models and seeking other creature comforts. Moe Axelrod, the World War One veteran and ex-bootlegger, has by the end of the play convinced Bessie's daughter Hennie to abandon her much-abused husband and infant to seek a life of pleasure with him. To be sure, arguments for social or family responsibility may be found in this often moving play, but the resolution nevertheless seems to suggest a definition of success devoid of commitment or love.

In *Golden Boy*, Joe Bonaparte, a violinist turned boxer, does become a hero *for his time,* defined by physical strength and a willingness to incapacitate or destroy his opponents in the prize ring. Although he has read the encyclopedia from cover to cover (perhaps fulfilling Ralph Berger's quest for learning) and "practiced his fiddle for ten years," the *private* world he has created is no longer sufficient for him. It cannot offer him the sense of power or perhaps the ability to dominate others for which he yearns. Indeed, he is seduced by the monied world that surrounds the prize arena and by the temptations offered by the gangster Eddie Fuseli, who seeks to remold the Golden Boy and turn him into a fighting machine—careless of others, indifferent to love, and irrevocably cut off from family ties and memories of the past. As the reborn Joe aggressively puts it, "When a bullet sings through the air it has no past—only a future—like me." Joe returns to his dressing room after what is to be his last fight, and his trainer, Tokio, notices that one eye is badly battered, symbolic of Joe's impairment of vision on a number of levels. The triumphant fighter learns that he has killed his opponent in the ring, and he must confront the implications of the disaster. In rejecting a personal integrity, he has betrayed his moral and spiritual center, and at the end of the play he dies, an apparent suicide. His personal tragedy is an awareness of the vacuity his life has become. He is trapped in a world that he himself has made, rejecting his father's simple but encompassing Old-World Italian version of what his personal struggle must lead to: fulfillment of a dream predicated on the yells of a mob over ten rounds, the quick buck, and tabloid headlines forgotten at a glance.

Both *The Big Knife* and *The Country Girl* are plays that show the failure of art and artists destroyed by a world that demands too much, too fast, too soon. In *The Big Knife*, Charlie Castle has given up a promising career in the theater and a somewhat vague

belief in political and social action to become one of Hollywood's big stars. Like Joe Bonaparte or perhaps Odets himself, Charlie is plagued by the idea that he has betrayed his considerable talent in exchange for money and stardom. Early in the play, he argues that the theater is "a bleeding stump. Even stars have to wait years for a decent play." Now in the movie business, he cannot afford "acute attacks of integrity." In a succession of films, he reflects "the average in one way or another" or is at best "the warrior of the forlorn hope." As Hank Teagle, a family friend, puts it, "Half-idealism is the peritonitis of the soul. America is full of it."

Like Joe Bonaparte, Charlie understands only too well what he has become. He remarks that he has become an imitation of his old self, and young new actors now imitate—or parody—the imitation. However, it is Marion Castle, Charlie's estranged wife, who most emphatically reminds Charlie of his self-betrayal, warning that he acts against his own nature. She says to him, "Your passion of the heart has become a passion of the appetite. Despite your best intentions, you're a horror."

Indeed, Charlie has taken a downward path. He is on the way to becoming an alcoholic, he has been unfaithful to his wife, and he has avoided prosecution for an accident that occurred during an evening of drunken driving by allowing a studio employee to confess in his place and serve a prison term. Only when the studio management obliquely threatens to murder the woman companion turned blackmailer who was with him on the evening of the accident does Charlie assert himself by preventing a new crime. However, despite his one moment of decency, Charlie is lost. He has, over Marion's objections, signed a new contract with the studio moguls who have by turns enticed and threatened him. Too weak to face a loss of status, poverty, and the unstable life of the theater, perversely attracted by the life he has been leading, and yet filled with self-loathing, Charlie takes his own life. Marion, his wife, leaves with Hank Teagle, the writer who has been faithful to his principles and whom Charlie had called his Horatio. Indeed, it is Teagle who will tell Charlie's story to the world—the tale of a man who was certainly not a Hamlet in depth or breadth, one who could understand and even dream but who could not change himself or the world, which paradoxically offered him so much and so little.

In *The Country Girl,* a play better structured and developed than *The Big Knife,* Broadway director Bernie Dodd is ready to take a chance on a new play starring a has been, an older actor named Frank Elgin. Dodd is "in love with art" and tells Elgin's wife Georgie that although he could "make a fortune in films," he intends to continue in the theater, where important work can still be done. Elgin's brilliant performances in two mediocre plays, based on his intuitive understanding of character and situation, had long ago inspired Dodd and now lead him to believe that the old actor can excel again. However, there are real problems. Elgin is weak and self-indulgent, he is an alcoholic, he is a liar, he needs constant reassurance, and like Arthur Miller's Willy Loman, he needs desperately to be well liked. As the play develops, Bernie Dodd and Georgie struggle with each other and with Frank. Each of the three seeks personal fulfillment, but finally the play becomes the all-consuming and all-important issue. Frank Elgin does succeed (with the help of the two closest to him) in rising to his full stature as an actor.

He vindicates Bernie's judgment and justifies (or necessitates) Georgie's remaining with him—after years of failure and disappointment.

In this play about theater life, Frank Elgin's transgressions are forgiven in the name of art and artistry. Bernie discovers that Frank has lied about his wife's past. He has told Bernie that Georgie was once Miss America (possibly to enhance his own prestige), that she is an alcoholic, and that she is a depressive who has attempted suicide. Georgie learns that Frank has lied about her (his lies are partially based on a play in which he once appeared) and observes that he has begun to drink again. When the producer (Phil Cook), Bernie Dodd, and others in the company find out, there is turmoil, but there are no lasting repercussions. Because of Bernie's belief in Frank Elgin's talent, the actor is to continue in the play. Frank himself is simply following an old pattern. He has for much of his adult life drunk steadily, taken pills, and lied to relieve the pressures on him. When his and Georgie's only child dies, when he loses much of his money in producing a play, and when he begins to fail as an actor, the old remedies are close at hand. The conflict between the easy indulgence of the moment and the stern realities of working in a creative but uncertain world—with its quick rewards and even quicker condemnations —leads to the kind of disintegration Odets so often sought to depict. In this play, as in *The Big Knife,* intuitive understanding, talent, and artistry bring some forms of self-fulfillment and recognition, but are by themselves no protection against weakness or personal loss. In *The Big Knife,* Charlie Castle finds suicide the only way out. Frank Elgin is successful at the end of *The Country Girl,* but one suspects that his future success will depend on the continued availability of the long-suffering wife who mothers him, on directors and producers who excuse his frequent lapses, on unending applause, and on total self-involvement and self-delusion.

Odets, then, in his work revealed his fascination with the world of art and his belief that art may enhance our understanding of the human condition, though it cannot alter the environment or our responses to it. The romantic vision that Odets pursued so intensely in a personal way might seem ennobling or heroic, but in a world of shrunken values and failed personal lives, it offers only a sense, a resonance, of what might have been. Indeed, the romantic stance—as Odets portrayed it in the America of his time—was collateral to be called in, leaving only a shell without substance. Despite the excitements of the conflict, Odets's vision of the truth was profoundly pessimistic. That he portrayed it as he did often showed courage as well as artistry.

Source: George L. Groman, "Clifford Odets and the Creative Imagination," in *Critical Essays on Clifford Odets,* edited by Gabriel Miller, G. K. Hall & Co., 1991, pp. 97-105.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, Clurman explores the allegorical nature of Golden Boy.

Golden Boy has already been praised as a good show, common-sense entertainment, and effective melodrama. It has also been blamed for betraying Hollywood influence in its use of terse, typical situations, story motifs which resemble that of either popular fiction or movies, and possibly too in its use of an environment (the prize-fight world) that somehow seems unworthy of the serious purpose professed by its author. There has been, in addition, almost universal admiration for many separate scenes and long passages of brilliant dialogue.

What has not been discussed very fully, however, is the total significance of these diverse elements, the meaning that their configuration within one framework might have. And it is this meaning, both in relation to the American scene and to Clifford Odets' work and progress within it, that might be most valuable to examine.

An early draft of *Golden Boy* bore the designation "a modern allegory." An allegory, I take it, is an extremely simple but boldly outlined tale in which a series of images is used to suggest a meaning of a more general, and usually a moral, nature. The good allegory will hold one's interest by the sheer directness or vividness of its story, the suggested meaning of which may occur to us only in retrospect, or which may be so organically imbedded in the structure of the story that in absorbing the story details we are almost automatically and spontaneously aware of their meaning. The allegory, in other words, deals in symbols that are so pointed and unmistakable that they transform themselves easily into the truth that their author hopes to express.

Whether or not Clifford Odets has chosen the happiest symbols in *Golden Boy* it is a fact that his intention was to convey such a truth, and to convey it in terms that would not only avoid preachment, but entertain us by the mere raciness of its presentation.

The story of this play is not so much the story of a prize-fighter as the picture of a great fight—a fight in which we are all involved, whatever our profession or craft. What the golden boy of this allegory is fighting for is a place in the world as an individual; what he wants is to free his ego from the scorn that attaches to "nobodies" in a society in which every activity is viewed in the light of a competition. He wants success not simply for the soft life—automobiles, etc.—which he talks about, but because the acclaim that goes with it promises him acceptance by the world, peace with it, safety from becoming the victim that it makes of the poor, the alien, the unnoticed minorities. To achieve this success, he must exploit an accidental attribute of his make-up, a mere skill, and abandon the development of his real self.

It so happens that Odets thought of embodying this fight for achievement in terms of the *fight business.* For it is obvious on reflection that though the use of the prize-fight world is central to the play's plot, in the playwright's larger intention it may be considered almost incidental. . . . Further than that, to dramatize the conflict between what a man

might be and what he becomes, the author has conceived a youth who is essentially an artist in a modest, unspectacular way. The hero is a violinist; and the fiddle in this allegory is employed as the symbolic antithesis of the fighting game.

The play tells the story then of an artist, or even more generally of a sensitive human being, growing up in a world where personal achievement is measured in terms of that kind of sensational success that our newspapers, our mania for publicity slogans, indeed our whole large-scale production psychology make into almost the only kind of success we can recognize. To tell this story two worlds are mirrored in the swiftest, barest terms: the artists' world with its humble pleasures, its small but basic contentments, and the business world with its fundamental uncertainty, hysteria, indifference to and impatience with human problems as such, its inevitable ruthlessness, its ultimate killer tendencies.

The home scenes with their funny lines, their petty "philosophical" disputes between the two old cronies, their healthy naïveté and even their vulgarity are not haphazardly designed to show off the author's faculty for salty speech or clever characterization. They are part of a pattern to illustrate both the sweet human earthiness that the hero leaves for the hard world where success is made, and the slight shabbiness which makes the hero look upon his background as an almost shameful world—futile, unglamorous, lamentably unaware of the advantages it is missing.

What happens to the boy when he makes the compromise with his true nature? Odets' allegory proceeds to show that the boy becomes a commodity, something that can be bought and sold, maneuvered, that he who begins by trying to beat the competitive world by playing its game becomes himself a thing possessed. Odets' hero is literally taken over by a whole ring of exploiters: agents, managers, merchants and middlemen of every description, including the criminal racketeer. And it is most characteristic of the situation that while the hero tries to use these people for his own ends he despises them, while they who are to a large extent dependent on him resent the intrusion of any of his personal problems into their business considerations.

Beyond this, the activity involved in performing his new task—fighting his way to "fame and fortune"—finally incapacitates him from ever doing his true work or going back to his old and real self. In realistic terms, he breaks his hands in a fight so that he no longer can hope to play the violin which once meant so much to him. And when he has become a fighter a certain coarseness develops in him, a certain despair. He is denatured to the point of becoming a killer, figuratively and, thanks to a ring accident, literally. In the interim, he has fallen in love, hoping, by a romantic attachment to a woman equally lost in the hurly-burly of the success world, to solve his inner dilemma. But he is a defeated man. He has nothing to live by now. Both worlds are closed to him, and he must die.

It is necessary to repeat the bare features of the story to show the particular scheme, at once ideological and narrative, that gives the play its basic form. If we analyze it even further we shall find that the choice and placement of almost every character fit into this scheme. Take, for example, the momentary presence of the older brother Frank, the

C.I.O. organizer. What is his significance here? His wounded head, his quiet retort "I fight," his sureness, are all minute indications that there is nothing abhorrent to the author in the thought of physical struggle as such, but that for people like his hero to have a world in which they might ultimately feel at home in being what they are and to have honor in such a world as well, it is necessary for the Franks to exist and fight. Our hero fights as a lone ego; Frank fights, as he says, together with and for millions of others. Frank is a free man; our hero is destroyed.

If there is any Hollywood influence in this play beyond the mere quick action and stock figures employed, it must be in the fact that in an important sense Hollywood and what it represents have provided the play with its inner theme, its true subject matter. So many artists today stand in relation to Hollywood as our hero in relation to his double career. From this point of view *Golden Boy* might be regarded as Clifford Odets' most subjective play.

Yet with this deeply and subtly subjective material, Odets has attempted to write his most objective play—a play that would stand on its own feet, so to speak, as a good show, a fast-moving story, a popular money-making piece. He has tried, in short, to bridge the gap between his own inner problems and the need he feels, like his hero and all of us in the audience, to make "fame and fortune." In his own work, he has tried to reconcile the fiddle and the fist; he has tried to yield himself a positive result out of a contradiction that kills his hero. He has done this by making the whole thing into a morality which would instruct and read us all a lesson (himself and his audience) even while it amused.

The strength and weakness of the play lie in this fusion of elements, admirable in intention, more varied in effect than in any of his former plays, but still imperfect as a whole. The strength of the present play is shown by its definite audience impact in the theatre; its imperfection comes from a certain lack of concreteness in details of plot and character—an objective flaw due to his mere nodding acquaintance with most of the play's locale, and from an insistence on certain character touches that mislead rather than clarify, such as the reference to the hero's eyes—a subjective flaw due to a reliance on a personal interpretation where a social one is required.

It must be pointed out in conclusion that the technical problem for a playwright—the problem of making himself completely articulate as well as sound—increases with the depth and richness of his material. The content of Clifford Odets' talent is greater than that of any young playwright in America today, and the line of his development must necessarily be arduous and complex. In certain instances, pat advice is more flattering to the critic than helpful to the writer. With Clifford Odets, we should simply be grateful for each of the endeavors that mark his progress. *Golden Boy* a step ahead in the career of one of the few American playwrights who can be discussed as an artist.

Source: Harold Clurman, "*Golden Boy,*" in *Six Plays of Clifford Odets,* Modern Library, 1939, pp. 429-33.

Adaptations

Golden Boy was adapted as a film in 1939 by Columbia Pictures. Directed by Rouben Mamoulian, the film features William Holden as Joe Bonaparte and Barbara Stanwyck as Lorna Moon. It is available on video from Columbia Tristar Home Video.

In 1964, *Golden Boy* was adapted as a Broadway musical, and ran for more than five hundred performances. The musical was produced by Hillard Elkins and starred Sammy Davis Jr.—an African-American actor—in the role of Joe Bonaparte, a racial change in Joe's character that altered the plot line of the original play significantly. The musical version of the play addressed several racial issues, including interracial relationships. In addition, the production featured one of the first racially integrated casts on Broadway and an African-American music conductor—George Rhodes. The book of the musical was written by Odets and William Gibson and was published by Samuel French in 1965, although it is currently out of print. The music was composed by Charles Strouse with lyrics by Lee Adams. An original cast recording was released on compact disc in 1999, and is available from Razor & Tie.

Topics for Further Study

The Great Depression is the most devastating economic collapse that has hit the United States thus far, although the current downturn has been compared to it in some ways. Research the various economic theories that attempt to explain both the Stock Market Crash of 1929 and the recent stock market drop that helped lead the country into recession. Explain either the similarities or the differences between the two economic collapses, using your research and any necessary visuals such as charts and graphs to support your claims.

Research the history of unions, and identify the very first independent labor union that was formed in America. Write a biography about one of the people who helped to start this union, and describe this union's initial mission statement or goals.

Research the life of Joe Louis, the famous boxer from the 1930s. Compare Louis's life story with the life story of Joe Bonaparte in the story. Using examples from the story and from Louis's life, explain how Odets might have used Louis as a model for Bonaparte.

As part of the New Deal, President Roosevelt helped find or create work for actors, musicians, writers, and other artists, each of which had a separate program devoted to their needs. Research these programs, and pick one that interests you. List the artists and works that came out of this movement, and discuss how they either did or did not make a lasting impression on the arts and on society.

In the play, Joe demonstrates a talent for both boxing and music, which some critics say is unrealistic. Find a famous athlete from history who possessed both an athletic and an artistic skill. Discuss how this person used both of his or her skills.

Compare and Contrast

1930s: The Great Depression begins shortly after the Stock Market Crash of 1929, and continues throughout the 1930s, shattering the financial lives of many Americans.

Today: America is experiencing a recession, which many believe is caused by the crashing of over inflated stocks, mainly in Internet-related businesses. Many Americans lose their retirement or other savings after their investments in these stocks are lost or depleted.

1930s: Roosevelt's New Deal programs are meant as a temporary means of assistance to get American citizens back on their feet. While Roosevelt believes in helping individuals through federal

aid, he places his focus on aid that keeps people working, so that people can regain their self-sufficiency.

Today: Welfare programs, one of the legacies of the New Deal, have largely been abandoned. Many people who have come to depend on welfare benefits are forced to enter the workforce.

1930s: During the Depression years, many people try to temporarily forget the miseries of their daily reality by attending movies, sporting events, and other forms of escapist entertainment.

Today: Reality television shows like CBS's phenomenally successful *Survivor,* spawn a huge revolution in television programming.

What Do I Read Next?

In *Golden Boy,* Joe gives up his dreams of music to enter the brutal world of boxing. Today, violence in boxing sometimes extends outside the ring, as in the case of former heavyweight champion, Mike Tyson, now an ex-convict. In

Blood Season: Mike Tyson and the World of Boxing (1996), Phil Berger, a former boxing correspondent for the *New York Times,* uses Tyson's violent story to examine the current state of boxing. Berger's book gives a candid look at the boxers, promoters, and businessmen who help the business thrive today.

Following the recent reforms in the welfare system, millions were forced to get unskilled jobs. In an experiment to see whether or not women could survive on these low wages, journalist Barbara Ehrenreich left her middle-class life and put herself in their place. Her 2001 book,

Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America, chronicles her attempts to get different low-paying jobs, find places to live, and above all, survive.

In William Golding's *Lord of the Flies,* originally published in 1954, a group of schoolboys stranded on a deserted island during World War II are forced to survive on their own, without the aid of adults or the conveniences of civilization. In the process, many of the boys revert back to their primal instincts, with violent and murderous consequences.

In Lorraine Hansberry's play *A Raisin in the Sun,* originally published in 1959, an African-American family in urban Chicago struggles to pull itself out of poverty. Conflicts arise—from the family and from society—when the family makes plans to use the leftover money from their dead father's insurance policy to buy a house in a white suburb. Hansberry was the first African-American woman to have a play produced on Broadway.

Odets used the events of the 1934 New York City cab strike to stage his one-act play *Waiting for Lefty* (1935). In the play, the taxi drivers' union gathers in a meeting hall to discuss whether or not to strike, in the process sharing their stories of desperate poverty. A fast-moving play, it is also considered by many critics to be Odets's most angry production.

In Odets's play *The Big Knife* (1949), Charlie Castle, a movie actor, desperately attempts to leave the corruption of Hollywood for his former life in the New York theater. However, Castle is a part of the Hollywood system, and he finds that it is not always easy to leave.

Mr. Bonaparte's friend, Mr. Carp, is a pessimist who frequently quotes the ideas of German philosopher, Arthur Schopenhauer. Many of the philosopher's key ideas are

contained in his two-volume collection, *The World as Will and Idea,* first published in Germany in 1819.

In John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), a depression-era family, the Joads, struggle to maintain their dignity in spite of crushing and desperate poverty. Although the Joads leave their home in the Dust Bowl of Oklahoma to go to California, where they are told that life is better, their situation only gets worse. Steinbeck's novel of social protest captures the despair that many families in America felt during the Great Depression.

First published in 1970, Studs Terkel's *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression* chronicles the 1930s through the eyes of the people who lived it. Over the span of three decades, Terkel interviewed a wide cross-section of America to gather the firsthand accounts of the depression for his book. Interviewees include the young and old, politicians, gangsters, and sharecroppers.

Further Study

Erem, Suzan, *Labor Pains: Inside America's New Union Movement,* Monthly Review Press, 2001.

In this book, Erem, a labor organizer, gives an insider's view of the struggles that both organizers and union members face today. In addition to fighting for better wages and working conditions, Erem details the internal struggles that take place.

Horne, Gerald, *Class Struggle in Hollywood, 1930-1950: Moguls, Mobsters, Stars, Reds, & Trade Unionists,* University of Texas Press, 2001.

Horne examines the often overlooked story of the Hollywood studio strikes that made headlines in the 1940s. The book details the studios' attempts to thwart the rise of independent unions, which the studios often discredited with Communist labels. However, this was just one aspect of a multifaceted affair, and Horne gives a thorough overview of all sides, using an abundance of historical documents to back up his assertions.

Kennedy, David M., *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945,* Oxford History of the United States series, Vol. 9, Oxford University Press, 2001.

Kennedy, a Stanford University history professor, chronicles the years during the Great Depression and World War II, at times posing theses that directly contradict established views. This accessible, comprehensive study relies on an extensive number of both published accounts and primary sources to recreate this formative period in America's history.

Morreale, Ben, and Robert Carola, *Italian Americans: The Immigrant Experience,* Immigrant Experience series, Hugh Lauter Levin Associates, 2000.

This book gives a thorough overview of how Italian Americans first came to America and what their experience has been like in the years since. The book also discusses how Italian Americans have helped to influence American culture, and features notable Italian-American entertainers, businessmen, and sports stars. The book is lavishly illustrated with more than two hundred color and black-and-white photographs that help bring the immigrant experience to life.

Ruiz, Vicki L., *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives: Mexican Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry, 1930-1950,* University of New Mexico Press, 1987.

This book gives the story of several women in southern California in the 1930s and 1940s, who banded together to establish effective labor unions in the seasonal canning industry. Eventually, these women were able to negotiate contracts with benefits like maternity leave, paid vacations, and company-provided day care.

Waldvogel, Merikay, *Soft Covers for Hard Times: Quiltmaking & the Great Depression,* Rutledge Hill Press, 1990.

Waldvogel explores quilt making during the depression, when groups of women would meet to quilt, discuss their hardships, and share tips for surviving. Despite the hardships discussed, however, the quilts of this era were vibrant and beautiful, embodying the hope that many had for better times. The book includes a number of photos of the quilts from this period.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

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

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

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

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

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

Selection Criteria

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

How Each Entry Is Organized

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

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

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

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

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

Other Features

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

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

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

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

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

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

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

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

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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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