Harvey Study Guide

Harvey by Mary Ellen Chase

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Introduction

Mary Coyle Chase's *Harvey* has been an American favorite since it was first brought to the Broadway stage in 1944. Before it opened, there were not very high expectations: the author had only written one play previously, which had been a quick failure. Harold Lloyd, Edward Everett Horton, Robert Benchley, and Jack Haley all turned down the lead role before Frank Fay accepted it. Fay, a retired vaudeville actor, astounded the critics with his performance. The play won the Pulitzer Prize for drama in 1944, and its initial run lasted for four years 1,775 performances. It has continually been revived around the globe since then. It was also adapted to film in 1950, starring Hollywood legend James Stewart, and has become one of Stewart's best-loved films.

The story is about Elwood P. Dowd, a good-natured, mild-mannered eccentric who is known in all of the cafeterias and saloons in his small town. Elwood is polite and cheerful and always friendly toward any strangers he might encounter, and he has just one problematic character trait: his best friend is an invisible six-foot-tall rabbit, Harvey. Wherever he goes, he brings an extra hat and coat for Harvey, and he buys theater tickets and railroad tickets in twos so that they can go everywhere together. His sister and her daughter try to have Elwood committed to the local sanitarium, where the behavior of the prominent psychologist and his staff raise the age-old question of who is more dangerous to society: the easy-going dreamer with a vivid imagination or the people who want him to conform to the accepted version of reality.

Author Biography

When she was a little girl, Mary Chase's three Irish uncles, Pete, Tim, and Jamie, amused her with stories from Celtic mythology of pookas and banshees. Chase was born in 1907 in Denver, Colorado, which is probably the model for the "western town" where *Harvey* takes place. She attended college in Denver and married Robert Lament Chase, a newspaper reporter, in 1928. Chase herself worked as a newspaper reporter at that time, first for the *Rocky Mountain News* and then as a freelance correspondent for United Press and International News Service. She gained reputation for being one of the best "picture stealers" in the Denver news business, visiting households of victims or criminals and walking away with stolen photographs of the involved person from the family's collection.

Chase's first play was *Me Third*, which was produced in 1936 for the Federal Theater Project, a government agency aimed at keeping writers employed during the Depression. *Me Third* was brought to Broadway in 1937, under the title *Now You've Done It;* it was an immediate failure. Her next play, *A Slip of a Girl,* never even made it to New York. When Chase had the idea that was to become Harvey, she went to the producer, Brock Pemberton, who had produced *Now You 've Done It.* Despite her weak record, Pemberton recognized the value of the property and put it into production.

It took Chase two years to write *Harvey.* She meticulously constructed a miniature stage on the dining room table in her house in Denver, so that she could imagine the characters' movements. Over the course of those years, the play underwent at least fifty rewrites, some of them quite significant. Originally, when it was entitled The *Pooka,* Harvey was a six-foot-tall parakeet. In a later version, *The White Rabbit*, Harvey was identifiable as audiences today know him, but the lead was a woman.

After *Harvey* became a critical and financial success on Broadway and in the movies, earning Chase a Pulitzer Prize, she continued to write plays, but only with marginal success. Her most famous *post-Harvey* work was *Mrs. McThing* in 1955. That, and another play, *Bemadine,* were adapted to movies, but none came anywhere near *Harvey's* success. She went on to publish two children's books, *Loretta Mason Potts* in 1958 and *The Wicked Pigeon Ladies in the Garden* in 1968. Mary Chase died of a heart attack in Denver on October 20, 1981.

Plot Summary

Act I

Harvey is a play about forty-seven-year-old Elwood P. Dowd, whose best friend is an invisible, six-foot-tall rabbit named Harvey. Dowd and his rabbit friend are well-known and liked in the taverns around town, but his relatives, who have come to live with him, are embarrassed by his behavior and try to have him committed to an insane asylum. The first scene opens with Dowd's sister, Veta Louise Simmons, and her daughter, Myrtle Mae, throwing a luncheon for the older society matrons of the town. They count on Dowd being out, but he comes home suddenly, talking to Harvey and holding doors for him, and, worse, introducing him to the ladies at the party. As the party clears out, Veta swears that he will not disgrace the family again, and she asks him to wait in the den, which he does happily, while she goes to make arrangements for him to be committed.

Scene II takes place at the mental institution, Chumley's Rest. Nurse Ruth Kelly, who is young and good-looking, interviews Veta about her brother, who is waiting outside in the taxi cab. When Elwood comes in, Kelly has an orderly take him upstairs. When the psychiatrist on duty, Dr. Sanderson, interviews Veta, he gets the impression that she is the one who has hallucinated Harvey (she admits to having seen him sometimes), and so he has her locked up. When he finds out that Elwood Dowd has been locked up, he assumes that a mistake has been made, and Dowd is brought down to the office, where Sanderson and Kelly apologize profusely, fearing that the sanitarium will be sued. Dowd, oblivious to the fact that he had been incarcerated in the first place, invites them both to have drinks with him later.

After Dowd leaves the scene (to explore the sanitarium where he has been told his sister is to be committed), Dr. Chumley, the esteemed director of the facility, enters and discovers that Dowd has left a hat with holes cut in the top. The hospital staff exits, then Dowd returns, just as Dr. Chumley's wife, Betty, enters, and he tells her that he is looking for Harvey, explaining that Harvey is a pooka a mythological spirit. After he leaves, she tells the others that he was looking for Harvey, and they realize that it was he, not Veta, who had delusions. They understand that the hat is Harvey's, that the holes are for his rabbit ears. At the end of the scene, Wilson, the orderly, looks up "pooka" in the dictionary and reads out loud the definition that somehow, mysteriously, appears there: "A wise but mischievous creature. Very fond of rum-pots, crackpots, and how are you Mr. Wilson?"

Act II

Scene I of Act II takes place in the library of the Dowd house. Myrtle is having the house appraised, planning to sell it as soon as Dowd is committed. Judge Gaffney has come to the house because he received a call from Veta, who was frantic. Veta arrives,

distraught, telling of being handled roughly at the sanitarium when they tried to commit her, accusing the people who run the place of having unnatural interest in sex, and instructing the judge to sue them. Wilson and Dr. Chumley arrive from the sanitarium, looking for Dowd, with a list of bars and firehouses that they have been to in their search. When Judge Gaffney and Dr. Chumley leave together, discussing Veta's impending lawsuit, Wilson and Myrtle flirt. They go off to the kitchen together, and Dowd comes in. He sees a flat parcel that Myrtle brought out of the garage to show Judge Gaffney, as evidence of David's madness: a painting of himself and a large rabbit, in a polka-dot collar and red necktie. Jetting the picture on the mantle, in front of his mother's portrait, he leaves. Veta and Dr. Chumley enter, and he asks about the portrait over the fireplace and she, not looking, answers as if his questions were about her mother's picture. Dowd phones, looking for Harvey, but while he is on the phone he says that Harvey just stepped in the door, so Veta determines that he is at a bar called Charlie's.

Scene II of Act II takes place at the sanitarium again. Dr. Sanderson, having been fired for falsely committing Veta, is packing his belongings. He and Nurse Kelly discuss having seen each other out on dates the previous Saturday, indicating that they are jealous, although neither is willing to openly declare affection. Dowd enters and gives Kelly a bunch of flowers Dr. Chumley's prize dahlias. He is under the impression that Kelly and Dr. Sanderson are going to join him for a drink at a bar, and when Wilson enters, Dowd invites him, too. He tells them that he was out at the bar with Dr. Chumley earlier, that after a few drinks the doctor saw Harvey also. Near the end of this scene, Nurse Kelly asks Dowd about his life, and he explains in a long speech how he and Harvey make the acquaintance of strangers when they sit in bars:

Soon the faces of the other people turn toward mine and smile. They are saying: "We don't know your name, Mister, but you're a lovely fellow." Harvey and I warm ourselves in these golden moments. We have entered as strangers soon we have friends. They come over. They sit with us. They drink with us. They talk to us. They tell us about the big terrible things they have done. The big wonderful things they *will* do. Their hopes, their regrets, their loves, their hates. All very large because nobody ever brings anything small into a bar. Then I introduce them to Harvey. And he is bigger and grander than anything they offer me. When they leave, they leave impressed.

At the end of this scene, Dr. Chumley enters, nervously, as if someone is following him. He goes into his office and closes the door, and, soon after, the door opens and closes again, as if by itself.

Act III

Dr. Chumley, who was last seen locking himself in his office, is knocking at the sanitarium door; when Wilson answers, he explains that he slipped out of the window of his office and went around. He is terrified. Myrtle and Judge Gaffney arrive. She still wants Dowd committed, but the judge has evidence that there might actually be a Harvey. Reading from a note pad, he describes Veta's testimony that she saw Harvey in

her kitchen one morning, calling to her, and she chased him away by shouting, "To hell with you!" Myrtle says that Dowd, claiming Harvey's help, is able to predict events in the future, such as the unexpected arrival of a neighbor's aunt. Nurse Kelly and Dr. Sanderson arrive, behaving like a couple in love, and Dr. Chumley tells Sanderson that he isn't fired after all. Sanderson suggests that Dowd should receive shock treatment with an injection of Doctor Chumley's formula 977.

When Dowd arrives, Dr. Chumley asks to speak with him alone. They discuss Harvey's power to stop time, which leads the doctor to fantasize about running off to a campground outside of Akron for two weeks with a strange girl who will stroke his head and say, "Poor thing! Oh, you poor, poor thing!" At Veta's request, Dowd agrees to take an injection of formula 977, even though he would not be able to see Harvey any more. While he is in the next room for the injection, the cab driver who brought Veta comes in to collect his fare. She cannot find her change purse and so has to ask Dowd for money. The cab driver, noticing what a nice person Dowd is, remarks that he will not be so nice after the injection, that people he brings to the sanitarium always are nice until they are "cured." Thinking about it, Veta realizes that she does not want Dowd changed, and she races in and stops the injection. Her change purse shows up before she leaves, and she realizes that Harvey had hidden it. The whole family leaves, with Elwood P. Dowd waiting a moment for Harvey to catch up with him.

Act 1, Scene 1

Act 1, Scene 1 Summary

The scene opens in the library of the Dowd family mansion. The room is filled with lots of old-fashioned and grandiose furniture, but the most obvious thing in the room is an oil painting of an older woman above the mantle. A woman's voice, singing badly, can be heard coming from the next room.

The telephone is ringing and Myrtle Mae, a young woman, comes to answer it. The phone call is for her mother, Veta, and Myrtle Mae calls her in. Upon learning that the call is from the Society Editor of the newspaper, Veta gladly takes it. It becomes apparent that Veta and Myrtle Mae have guests in another part of the house, and Veta is describing the particulars of the gathering over the phone. While doing so, she motions to the portrait above the mantle, and proceeds to describe her late mother's great accomplishments.

Myrtle Mae announces that Mrs. Chauvenet, a very important guest, has arrived and Veta quickly gets off the phone. Veta advises Myrtle to be nice to Mrs. Chauvenet as she has a grandson about her age, but Myrtle starts to protest, citing that with a "screwball" uncle like her Uncle Elwood, it would make no difference whether she was nice or not. She also mentions her anger at a friend of Elwood's named Harvey. Veta gets very upset at the mention of that name, and insures Myrtle that neither Elwood nor Harvey will be around that afternoon to spoil their party. Myrtle wonders why they have to put up with either of them to which Veta reminds her that her mother had left everything to her brother and that in fact Elwood is putting up with them. The singing in the next room stops and Myrtle Mae and Veta exit the room.

A moment later, Elwood P. Dowd enters the room. He is a friendly-looking 47-year-old man and, although he wears a raincoat and hat, he carries an extra set of each in his hands. He is alone when he enters, but he appears to be making bows and gesturing for another invisible person to walk in before him. Elwood excuses himself from the invisible person next to him, whom he calls Harvey, telling him that he has to pick up the phone. After this, the phone rings. It is a sales call from a Miss Greenawalt who would like to sell a subscription to Elwood. Elwood is exceedingly polite over the phone and orders two subscriptions from Miss Greenawalt: one for himself and one for Harvey. He then proceeds to invite Mrs. Greenawalt to join him and his sister at his sister's party before hanging up the phone and exiting the stage.

Veta and Myrtle Mae enter followed closely by Mrs. Chauvenet, a wealthy older woman. Veta calls Mrs. Chauvenet Aunt Ethel, and Mrs. Chauvenet makes some humorous remarks about thinking that Veta was dead since she had not seen her in so long. Mrs. Chauvenet also makes some remarks about how much she wishes to see Elwood. As she does, Elwood enters, and Mrs. Chauvenet is thrilled to see him again. Despite Veta and Myrtle's insistence that she join the party as quickly as possible, Mrs. Chauvenet

proceeds to talk to Elwood and asks him to join her for dinner soon. Elwood then introduces Mrs. Chauvenet to Harvey and tells her that Harvey is a Pooka. Elwood then talks to Harvey about Mrs. Chauvenet in front of her, while she becomes increasingly alarmed at witnessing Elwood's perfectly calm conversation with an invisible creature. Eventually, Elwood says that he and Harvey will go talk to the rest of their friends and motions for Harvey to step in ahead of him into the next room. Seeing the expression on Mrs. Chauvenet's face, he stops to tell her not to be alarmed because Harvey stares at everyone like that and that he in fact liked her very much. Elwood goes into the parlor and Mrs. Chauvenet immediately leaves the house, very flustered.

Myrtle goes to the parlor door and announces with great anxiety that Elwood is now introducing Harvey to the rest of their friends. She wonders aloud why her uncle cannot be run over by a truck. Veta scolds her and claims that it is not Elwood's fault he is the way he is. The phone rings, and Veta picks it up to discover Mrs. Greenawalt on the other end, wondering if she should bring some whiskey over to the party. Veta hangs up the phone and proclaims to Myrtle that Elwood has disgraced them for the last time. She calls him in from the parlor. Myrtle claims that Veta is no match for Elwood as she exits the drawing room while Elwood is entering.

Veta asks Elwood to sit down in the parlor and wait for her, as she has something very important about which to speak to him. Elwood happily accepts, and Veta leaves the room, locking the door behind her. After she has gone, Elwood walks over to a bookshelf, takes out a certain book and pulls out a bottle of liquor from behind it. He walks over to a chair and answers Harvey's unheard questions about the title, author and publisher of the book he is about to read.

Act 1, Scene 1 Analysis

In the first scene of her play, Mary Chase introduces both the family and the major conflict that will be at the heart of the entire piece. Myrtle Mae Simmons and her mother Veta Simmons are two anxious women who are trying to get in the good graces of society, with hints that it is in order to find a husband for Myrtle. However, their main obstacle appears to be in Veta's brother Elwood and his friend Harvey. We hear references made to Elwood's unstable mental state and undesirable friend before we ever meet them. Chase rouses our curiosity and sets up our expectations of meeting these two characters that are apparently causing Veta and Myrtle such grief.

Upon first seeing Elwood, all we see is a mild-mannered and seemingly very ordinary man. The only thing that seems to be off-color is the extra coat and hat that he is carrying and a few bows and gestures that seem out of place. Slowly, however, we come to realize that Elwood is not alone, or at least he does not think he is. Using a very comic phone conversation, Chase does two things. First, she shows us Elwood's extremely polite and pleasant demeanor, which he seems to be able to convey to someone as annoying as a telemarketer (for that is who is on the other end of the phone). More importantly, she points out to us that Harvey is in fact an invisible friend of Elwood's.

The rest of the scene sets the comic tone for the rest of the play as well as everyone's attitude towards Harvey. Mrs. Chauvenet, as an outsider hearing of this matter for the first time, is horrified and wants to get away as soon as possible. Myrtle, as someone who has had to deal with this for some time, is merely annoyed and feels that Elwood and Harvey are ruining her prospects. Veta is also annoyed, but something is strange about the way she talks about Harvey. At one point, she asks Myrtle to see if Harvey is with Elwood, foreshadowing the notion that perhaps she does not entirely disbelieve in Harvey's presence. Of course, there are Elwood's interactions with Harvey, which are as perfectly natural as they are with any of the other visible characters in the play.

In the very last moments of this scene, we see Elwood and Harvey alone together, and we see Elwood taking a secret stash of alcohol out from behind the library. It is these last moments that introduce some of the darker tones of the play, including that of potential alcohol abuse.

Act 1, Scene 2

Act 1, Scene 2 Summary

This scene takes place at Chumley's Rest, which is a sanitarium for mental patients. At the opening of the scene Nurse Ruth Kelly, a young pretty woman, is talking to Veta. It becomes apparent that Veta is giving Miss Kelly information about Elwood when she is about to check him into the sanitarium. She tells Miss Kelly that Elwood is in the cab and Nurse Kelly instructs Wilson, a burly attendant, to go fetch him.

While Wilson is away, Veta asks to see Dr. Chumley, the head of the sanitarium, but Miss Kelly informs her that only his associate, Dr. Sanderson, sees patients now. While Miss Kelly is praising Dr. Sanderson, she subtly implies that theirs is more than the average doctor/nurse relationship. She primps herself before she goes to fetch him.

Wilson brings Elwood, who appears as cheerful as ever. Wilson roughly takes Elwood up the stairs. Dr. Sanderson enters and, after some introductions, starts to ask Veta questions about Elwood. Veta starts to ramble about Elwood's peculiarities. She mentions that he drinks and then she starts to talk about Harvey. Dr. Sanderson is uncertain who Harvey is and asks if he is a friend of Elwood's that he found in a bar. Veta explains that Harvey is a six-foot-tall white rabbit, but then she wonders if he is perhaps six and a half feet tall. Dr. Sanderson is confused and asks Veta to clarify what she is saying. Frustrated and feeling like she's repeating herself, Veta goes on a small tirade about Harvey, the rabbit who is Elwood's best friend and whom he takes everywhere. Then, after being promised the doctor's strictest confidence, Veta confesses that even she has seen Harvey a few times and that he is every bit as big as Elwood says he is. A look of recognition starts to creep into Dr. Sanderson's face, and he then starts to grill Veta about her own eating habits, sleeping habits, and grief over her mother's death. Dr. Sanderson starts pressing a buzzer on his desk, while talking very gently and soothingly to Veta and making sure that she sits down in a chair. Dr. Sanderson asks her to stay where she is and rushes out the door. After a few moments, however, Veta mutters to herself that she must get Elwood's things from the cab and she leaves.

Dr. Sanderson, Miss Kelly and Wilson come back to the main lobby to find Veta gone. Dr. Sanderson is extremely distressed at her getaway and bids Wilson to go after her. He claims that her condition is very serious and that she needs treatment right away. Miss Kelly is confused and says that she thought her brother is the one who needed treatment. Dr. Sanderson explains that because Veta knew his brother was about to commit her, she came down to discredit him first. Miss Kelly realizes her horrible mistake and reluctantly tells Dr. Sanderson that she already sent Elwood up to a room. Dr. Sanderson is mortified. He exchanges some sarcastic, yet flirtatious, comments with Miss Kelly who is certain that Dr. Chumley will fire her because of her mistake. Dr. Sanderson assures her that he will take all of the responsibility and asks Miss Kelly to make sure that Elwood stays there until he returns, even though Miss Kelly is very

nervous that Elwood will be furious. As Sanderson leaves, he makes an aside that clinches that he feels amorously towards Miss Kelly, and Miss Kelly does the same as soon as he is gone.

Wilson enters and tells Miss Kelly that he managed to catch a kicking and screaming Veta before she left the premises. Miss Kelly tells him what room to take her to and he leaves. Elwood enters and Miss Kelly approaches him cautiously. Elwood seems to be in great spirits, however, and he hands Miss Kelly his business card. Miss Kelly pulls up a chair for Elwood, and he asks for two. Elwood makes a very chivalrous show of sitting down only after Miss Kelly has sat down, and then he compliments her on her looks. As Elwood is about to introduce Miss Kelly to Harvey, Dr. Sanderson comes into the room.

Sanderson speaks very courteously to Elwood and goes out of his way to make sure that Elwood is comfortable. Several times, Elwood goes to introduce Harvey to him, but each time Sanderson turns the conversation back to the matter at hand. Sanderson tries to make excuses for his and Miss Kelly's mistake in sending Elwood upstairs, but because he uses euphemistic language, a very funny exchange takes place during which Elwood thinks Sanderson and Kelly are talking about making love to one another. Eventually, Dr. Sanderson gets on the topic of Veta and his theories that Veta is an alcoholic. Elwood claims that he is very surprised to hear that. Dr. Sanderson also mentions the issue of Harvey and Veta's claims that Elwood has been persecuting her with him. Elwood denies that claim and is once again about to introduce Harvey to the doctor, when he interrupts. Throughout this conversation, it is not obvious to Sanderson or Kelly that Elwood is talking about Harvey as if he exists, but rather they think that Elwood is agreeing with them about Veta's condition. Eventually, Sanderson asks Elwood to sign commitment papers for Veta. Elwood says that usually Veta does that kind of thing and, when Sanderson insists, he says he will talk it over with their lawyer, Judge Gaffney.

In order to convince Elwood, Sanderson promises him that he can come back and visit anytime and offers to allow him to take a tour of the premises now. Elwood agrees to do so for Veta's sake. Sanderson is visibly relieved at Elwood's reaction and tells him that for a layman, he has "an unusually acute perception into psychiatric problems." Elwood seems so pleased with their conversation that he invites both Kelly and Sanderson to go to Charlie's bar with him at ten o'clock that night, after they get off work. Sanderson seems taken aback, but agrees to it to appease Elwood. Elwood exits.

Sanderson tells Kelly that he will meet Elwood, but that she does not have to go. Kelly gets angry and tells Sanderson that she wants to go because Elwood was such a gentleman. Sanderson makes some snide remarks, telling Kelly that she would go out with anyone who would flatter her. Before they get into a full-blown argument, however, Dr. Chumley enters and they both stand at full attention.

Chumley asks after Veta and comments that Harvey is a very unusual name for an animal. He suggests to Sanderson that perhaps they can use his formula 977 on her. As he is about to leave, he notices a coat and hat on his table and asks whose it is. Sanderson suggests Elwood's but Kelly insists that he had his coat and hat on.

Chumley picks up the hat, and he is surprised to find that there are two holes cut out in the crown. He tells Kelly to take it away.

Wilson enters and is obviously very reverential of Chumley. He tells him that he took Veta upstairs, and because Nurse Kelly had not showed up, he had taken her corset off himself and placed her in the hydro tub. He suddenly remembers that he left the water on and runs upstairs.

Betty, Dr. Chumley's wife, enters and asks Dr. Chumley if he's forgotten that they had promised to go to Dr. McClure's cocktail party. Chumley says that he will be right down as soon as he looks in on a patient. Sanderson and Chumley leave.

Elwood enters and starts looking around the room. Betty sees him and introduces herself. Elwood good-naturedly introduces himself and gives her one of his business cards. He then tells her that he is looking for Harvey. Betty asks if Harvey is a patient and Elwood replies that no, Harvey is his best friend and a Pooka. He tells Betty that Harvey had come out with him and Veta this afternoon. Betty asks when he last saw him, and Elwood points to a chair and says that his hat and coat were on the table. Betty points out that since the hat and coat are gone, Harvey must have left. She then asks if Pooka is something new because she has never heard of it before. Elwood claims that he had never heard of it before he had met Harvey either. He then starts to explain how Harvey is very choosey when it comes to liking people but says that he would almost definitely like Betty. He also says that Harvey likes his sister Veta, but that Veta does not seem to like him. Betty muses that she gave up expecting her family to like her friends long ago. Elwood then invites Betty downtown for a drink, but Betty thanks him and says that she is waiting to go to a cocktail party with her husband. She says that she will take down a message to give to Harvey however. Elwood is very grateful and tells her to tell Harvey to meet him downtown if he does not have any other plans. Betty says that he will offer Harvey a ride down there if she comes across him, as that is where she and Dr. Chumley are going. Elwood thanks her and tells her that she cannot miss Harvey if she sees him, because he is very tall. He exits.

Chumley, Sanderson and Kelly come in talking about the treatment they will be giving Veta. Chumley is getting ready to leave with Betty, when she tells him that a man named Elwood P. Dowd came in here looking for a friend that he had come in with earlier. Everyone is confused because Kelly says that Elwood did not come in with anyone except Veta. Betty insists that he said that his friend had his hat and coat on the table here earlier and that she had promised that they would give his friend a ride if they should run into him. She mentions that the friend's name is Harvey and that he is a Pooka. Sanderson, Chumley and Kelly are all astounded. Betty is confused at their expressions.

Sanderson wants to know where Elwood went and Chumley bellows after Kelly to get him the hat that was found earlier. Kelly leaves and Chumley heads over to the phone. He calls up Judge Gaffney and asks for the spelling of the name of the patient that was supposed to be committed today. Judge Gaffney gives him the name of Elwood P. Dowd. Kelly returns with the hat and Chumley immediately turns on Sanderson with it.

He angrily asks Sanderson if he went to medical school and realized that a hat for a rabbit would have two holes in it to make room for ears. Sanderson tries to defend himself by saying that Dowd seemed reasonable this afternoon, but Chumley will not hear any of it. He tells Sanderson that he is going to search for Elwood himself and that, as soon as he gets back, Sanderson will be dismissed. Chumley barks orders to everyone else and he, Kelly, and Sanderson exit.

Betty and Wilson are left alone. Betty asks Wilson if he knows what a Pooka is, but Wilson says that he does not. Betty goes to an encyclopedia to look it up, but hurriedly puts the book down after a moment, claiming that Dr. Chumley would be furious if she were still standing there once he came back down. She exits. Curious, Wilson goes over to the encyclopedia and reads that a Pooka is a fairy spirit in animal form that is always very large, mischievous and wise. As he is about to finish the definition, he reads the line: "How are you Mr. Wilson?" Astonished that the encyclopedia is talking to him, Wilson flings it down and runs out of the room.

Act 1, Scene 2 Analysis

In this scene, there is a lot of very comedic miscommunication. Of course, the first and most obvious form of miscommunication happens when Vera is trying to commit Elwood, and Dr. Sanderson believes that she is the crazy one. Another very humorous one occurs when Dr. Sanderson is trying to explain the confusion to Elwood and he thinks that he is explaining a tryst that he had earlier with Miss Kelly.

Throughout this scene, Chase is setting up the audience to expect that Elwood will give himself away to the doctors at any moment. However, every time he goes to introduce Harvey to them, he is interrupted. The language and flow of conversation that is presented in this scene is also very clever and euphemistic. Every time Elwood does mention Harvey, Sanderson and Kelly are able to construe it as something else. We, as the audience, know what Elwood means, but the doctor and nurse instead choose to believe that Elwood is using analogies and wit when in fact he is talking very frankly about his imaginary friend. Even as he is describing Harvey to Betty, everything he says can be construed as a perfectly normal way to describe a friend. There is one particular moment, as Elwood is about to leave, when we are certain that he will be found out. He tells Betty that she cannot miss Harvey. While we are expecting that he is a giant talking rabbit, or something of that sort, all Elwood says is that he is very tall.

Besides being humorous, this scene also furthers the magical element of the play; it implies for the first time that Harvey may not just be a figment of Elwood's imagination and it does so in two ways. First, we hear Veta's confession that she has seen the white rabbit too. From what we know of Veta, she seems like a sensible and altogether unimaginative woman, so hearing this revelation is startling. The most concrete proof comes at the very last moment in the scene, when Wilson is reading the encyclopedia and sees a missive directed to him in the print. Wilson definitely seems like a straightforward character that is far removed from the situation of Harvey and Elwood.

Therefore, for him, as an outsider, to witness proof of Harvey's existence is akin to us, as the reader or audience, witnessing proof of the same.

Act 2, Scene 1

Act 2, Scene 1 Summary

This scene takes place in the Dowd library again, about an hour after the previous one. Myrtle Mae is showing the house around to some prospective buyers, when Judge Gaffney comes in inquiring after Veta. It seems that Veta had called him in hysterics, and that he had rushed over as quickly as possible. Myrtle is confused because her mother has gone to put Elwood away in the sanitarium and she does not understand why she would be calling her lawyer. While they are talking, the judge mentions how bad he feels about Elwood being locked up. He mentions all of Elwood's positive attributes: brains, personality and friends. He also mentions his admiration for Elwood's ability to take things calmly, although he supposes that is the reason he's in the trouble he's in today: he took seeing a giant rabbit very calmly too. Myrtle is not as kind towards her uncle.

Veta enters looking massively disheveled. She is clearly shaken up. Myrtle and the Judge help her to a chair and Veta tells the Judge that she wants him to sue the sanitarium. She starts to tell them about her whole ordeal, and mentions Wilson's rough treatment of her and the fact that he tore her clothes off and stuck her in a bathtub. She is also very upset with the sorts of questions the doctors asked her because, as she put it, they all had to do with "sex urges."

Myrtle asks where Elwood is and Veta says that she does not know and that she should have known better than to try outsmarting him. She claims that something protects him, maybe even the Pooka, before she leaves to go to bed.

Myrtle is adamant to the judge that they find Elwood and lock him up. The judge defends him, but she claims that it is horrendous living with him and tells the judge that she is going to show him what Elwood had brought home six months ago. She exits.

Wilson enters the room and asks if Elwood is in the house. Wilson says that they have visited 18 bars and have not yet found him. Dr. Chumley closely follows him. Upon learning who he is, Judge Gaffney makes it clear that he is planning to sue the sanitarium. Chumley acts as if he is outraged at this, since he is now personally interested in Elwood's case and since his interest is something no amount of money can buy. Besides, he assures Gaffney that he has fired Sanderson, the person responsible for the mistake.

Myrtle enters with a large flat parcel wrapped in brown paper that she leans up against the wall. She is introduced to Chumley and Wilson and she and Wilson are clearly interested in each other right off the bat. Chumley insists on seeing Veta and the judge finally agrees to escort him upstairs. Myrtle and Wilson flirt a little, and then they go off into the kitchen for a snack.

A moment later, Elwood enters. He goes to the phone and dials a number. He speaks to Betty Chumley and asks her if she has seen Harvey. He tells her that he went to the cocktail party that they said they were going to, but that he did not see her. Betty tries to find out where he's calling from, but Elwood simply answers that he is where he is and that he will be leaving soon to find Harvey. He hangs up the phone and sees the flat parcel up against the wall. He looks excited and opens it. It is an oil painting of himself and a large white rabbit in a polka-dot collar and red necktie. Elwood admires it for a moment and then walks over and places it over the mantle, right over the portrait of his mother. He tips his hat to it and leaves.

Veta and Chumley enter with Veta arguing that she is planning to sue the sanitarium no matter what he says. Chumley notices the portrait above the mantle right away and enquires after it. Veta does not look up at the portrait and starts talking about how the portrait is the pride of the house. She scolds the doctor's shortsightedness and goes into a long speech about art showing not only reality but also the dream behind it. In the middle of this speech, she glances at the portrait and nearly faints because it is not the picture of her mother at all.

The phone rings and Elwood is on the other end. Chumley urges Veta to act calmly and find out where he is. Elwood wants to know where Harvey is. Chumley tells him to say that Harvey is in the house, to which Veta stoically replies that Harvey is not in the house. With prompting from Chumley, Veta eventually tells Elwood that Harvey is at the house but in the bathtub so he cannot come to the phone. She wants to know where Elwood is so that she can send Harvey to meet him. However, Elwood then says that Harvey just walked through the door, and advises Veta to check the bathtub since someone else must be in there.

Veta hangs up the phone but tells Chumley that she knows where he is anyway, a bar called Charlie's Place. Chumley leaves to go after Elwood himself, even though Veta warns him not to. She claims that she considers Elwood dangerous but will not say exactly why. Chumley is certain he can handle him and leaves. After a moment, Veta calls up to ask Myrtle to check to see who is in the bathtub, before realizing what she has just said.

Act 2, Scene 1 Analysis

As with the rest of the play, this scene provides humorous dialogue and situations. One of the most ironic aspects of the play happens in this scene with the flirtation of Myrtle and Wilson. Myrtle is adamant that Elwood be locked up because he is ruining her prospects for a good marriage. Yet it appears she is falling for Wilson, a gruff blue-collar worker whose job it is to deal with the insane. Therefore, the whole purpose for locking Elwood away in the first place might be a moot point.

This scene is also very important because of Veta's speech about art. During this speech, she gets to the very heart of the play. She says: "A painting shows not only the reality but the dream behind it – It's out dreams that keep us going. That separate us

from the beasts." Harvey is clearly Elwood's dream, and it is because Veta makes this speech that the ending of the play is foreshadowed. Will Veta allow that dream to be taken away from Elwood if she truly feels this way? Of course, a moment later she is also telling Chumley that she believes Elwood to be dangerous, which is paradoxical to both what she said before and to what the audience knows about Elwood. Therefore, it seems that Veta is genuinely torn about what to do with her brother.

In addition, two other important story threads are continued in this scene. One is the dialogue that once again shows that even Veta believes in the existence of Harvey. The other is Elwood's ability to elude everyone with nothing more than his extraordinarily well-mannered and pleasant nature.

Act 2, Scene 2

Act 2, Scene 2 Summary

This scene takes place back in the main office of Chumley's Rest, about four hours after the previous scene. Wilson is helping Sanderson pack his things. Kelly is on the phone, calling the accident bureau. It seems as if Chumley had not been seen or heard of for the past four hours. Wilson is the most concerned about him. He tells Kelly that if she does not hear from Chumley soon, he is going into town to look for him himself. He exits, leaving Kelly and Sanderson alone.

There is an awkward silence, and Kelly starts to shyly tell Sanderson that she is sorry he is leaving. Sanderson responds to her sarcastically, causing Kelly to blush and retract her statement. Sanderson casually starts to give advice to Kelly about the kind of men she shouldn't date, claiming to have seen her with an undesirable one at a dance last Saturday. Kelly coolly responds that she did not see Sanderson at the dance, but then gets flustered enough to make some nasty comments about Sanderson's date. They get into an intense argument that is clearly fueled by the jealousy each one feels towards the other's date. Sanderson leaves.

Elwood enters with a bouquet of flowers for Kelly. Kelly keeps trying to find out where Dr. Chumley is, but in his usual sweet and roundabout way, Elwood manages to keep flattering Kelly without giving her any concrete answers. He tells her he does not know where Chumley is and asks if she and Dr. Sanderson are ready to go out for their drink now. Dr. Sanderson comes back and tries to talk reasonably to Elwood. He tells Elwood that he has to face reality to which Elwood happily replies that he wrestled with reality for forty years and is happy to state that he finally won out over it.

Wilson enters and upon seeing Elwood, roughly asks him what he did to the doctor. Elwood repeats that the doctor did not divulge his plans to Elwood. He responds very calmly and respectfully to Wilson's obvious threats, and even invites him out for a drink with the three of them.

Sanderson then takes charge, and asks Elwood to repeat the events of the night. Elwood tells them that Chumley came into Charlie's Place and asked for him. He then goes into a very long and detailed account of Chumley's interactions with Harvey. According to him, after quite a few drinks, Harvey and Dr. Chumley got into a heated debate over who should pay for the drinks. After that was over, Dr. Chumley tried to hit on a blond sitting nearby and got himself escorted out of the bar by the blonde's escort. Next, Harvey and Chumley were arguing over which bar to go to next, and by the time Elwood got back from buying himself another drink, they were both gone.

Wilson asks where they went, and then catches himself and asks where the doctor went. Elwood says that he did not know because he came back for his date with Kelly and Sanderson. Wilson is extremely skeptical, but Nurse Kelly appears to believe what

Elwood is telling him. As Elwood goes on explaining in his calm way, Wilson finally goes to physically attack him. Sanderson has to hold him back.

Kelly meanwhile calls Charlie's Place and finds out that Dr. Chumley had been there earlier just as Elwood had described. Elwood says that he has things to do and must be going. Kelly asks him what sort of things he does, and Elwood starts to explain the adventures he and Harvey have in bars every night. He says that people smile at him and soon they start to tell him stories about themselves, their hopes, their loves, etc. and that when they do, Elwood always introduces them to Harvey who is bigger and grander than anything they have to offer.

Sanderson inquires about how he was able to call him Harvey, and Elwood matter-of-factly explains their very first encounter when he saw Harvey leaning against a white lamppost. He had asked him his name, and Harvey had asked him what his favorite name was. When Elwood has proclaimed that it was Harvey, Harvey had responded that, coincidentally, that was his name. Sanderson tries to analyze this by suggesting that Elwood's father, or perhaps best childhood friend was named Harvey, but Elwood insists that he had never met anyone named Harvey before. Sanderson then asks Elwood to come upstairs with him. Elwood complies but says that he cannot stay long. Elwood, Sanderson and Kelly exit.

Just then, a nervous looking Chumley comes in. Wilson asks him worriedly if he is okay. Chumley is confused and says that of course he is, but that he is being followed. He tells Wilson to lock the front door and heads into his office and locks the door behind him. Wilson looks perplexed, but exits.

A moment later, the front door opens on its own and then closes. After a few moments, the door to Chumley's office opens by itself and then closes. There are the clicks of locks. The invisible Harvey has come and gone.

Act 2, Scene 2 Analysis

In this scene, we get a sense for the first time that Elwood is a man who is actually in possession of all his faculties. His line "I wrestled with reality for forty years, and I am happy to state that I finally won out over it" shows that he is aware that his perception of things may not be entirely based on reality. Yet, he is perfectly happy with this knowledge. Although Elwood may be crazy, he is, in a sense, also the calmest and sanest character in the whole play. While everyone around him seems to be frantic at some point or another, Elwood always remains serene, polite and very content. The question that Chase poses to the audience is that if seeing Harvey allows Elwood happiness, courteousness, and compassion then, what is the harm in it? Just because it is not someone else's perception of what is real and normal, does that make it wrong?

To further drive this point home, this scene shows that more and more people are starting to believe in Harvey. Nurse Kelly is the first to admit it, but even Wilson finds himself slipping and acknowledging Harvey as a real entity. At the very end, it is obvious

that Chumley believes in him, and then, finally, the audience must believe in him too because we "see" tangible proof of his existence: Harvey opens and closes doors. Therefore, all along, it turns out that perhaps Elwood is not only not crazy, but also more perceptive than anyone else both in the play and in the audience.

Act 3

Act 3 Summary

This scene takes place at Chumley's Rest, a few minutes after the end of the last scene. There is a loud knocking at the front door and when Wilson answers it, he finds a much shaken Chumley. Wilson wonders how he got out there, since he was just in his office a few moments ago. Chumley reveals that he climbed out of his office window. Clearly terrified, he asks Wilson both not to leave him and to get Elwood out of there. Wilson is not sure which direction to follow, when there is a knock at the door and Judge Gaffney and Myrtle Mae enter.

Judge Gaffney asks to speak to Chumley in his office, but Chumley makes a big show of not wanting to go in there. They sit down where they are instead. The judge asks Chumley if he has ever considered that Harvey might in fact exist. Myrtle is surprised at this question and says that of course he does not. However, the judge explains that Veta swore, under oath, that she had seen the rabbit once and that, resenting the intrusion, she had said something to drive him from the room. Chumley seems very interested in finding out what she said to make him leave. After some prodding, the judge finally admits that she told Harvey "to hell with you" to make him leave. Chumley appears to be highly intrigued by this piece of information as he keeps staring nervously at his office door.

Sanderson and Kelly enter, at this point clearly reconciled. Chumley reinstates Sanderson right away, much to his and Kelly's delight, Myrtle asks if Elwood will stay, and Chumley is emphatic that the sanitarium go back to the way it was before Elwood got there. Myrtle sighs but says that she understands since she also gets unnerved at the way her uncle knows what is going to happen before it happens because Harvey tells him everything. Of course, she adds that it is silly since there is no such thing as Harvey. Chumley wonders if his entire professional life has been in vain, since there have been genuine miracles happening all around him all this time.

Veta enters and, upon looking around, claims that she is relieved that there is nobody here but people. Wilson asks Myrtle out on a date, but Veta answers for her indignantly that of course she will not go. Myrtle does not seem anywhere near as indignant. Sanderson goes up to Chumley and says that he would like to give his diagnosis. He says that he thinks that Elwood is suffering from hallucinations and that Veta is the victim of autosuggestion. He recommends that they give Elwood formula number 977 so that he will no longer see the rabbit. He is certain that it will work because it has worked in hundreds of other psychopathic cases. Veta is indignant that Sanderson is calling her brother a psychopath, but Myrtle wonders why she would bring Elwood here if she didn't also think he was one. Veta is distraught and says that she did not know what else to do with him. She wonders in a town full of people why Harvey had to choose Elwood to speak to.

The judge butts in that he thinks the formula is a good idea since it will bring Elwood back to reality, and that is what they want. Veta says that if Elwood cannot see Harvey anymore, then he will not let him in and she will deal with him if he comes to the door. Myrtle asks Veta to stop talking about Harvey as if he exists, but Veta knowingly tells Myrtle that she has a lot to learn.

Elwood enters, ready to ask everyone to join him at Charlie's Place. Veta tells Elwood that he is going to have to stay here. Elwood then asks Chumley how he got along with Harvey. Chumley tells everyone to leave him alone with Elwood to that he can make his diagnosis. Reluctantly, everyone except for Chumley and Elwood leaves.

As soon as everyone is gone, Chumley starts to grill Elwood about Harvey and his special powers. Elwood explains that not only can Harvey tell what's going to happen in the future but also that he can also stop time so that someone can go anywhere they'd like and be able to come back without any time passing. Chumley seems fascinated by this notion and asks Elwood if Harvey has ever done such a thing for him. Elwood says that, although Harvey has offered, he has yet to think of a place he would rather be then wherever he already is. Chumley does not seem much interested in this observation and starts telling Elwood where he would like to go. He says that he would like to take a two-week vacation to a cottage with a beautiful young woman, who does not speak but just responds to his every whim. Elwood wonders if he would not get bored with that situation, but Chumley claims that he would not. He is starting to speak to Elwood as if he were the patient and Elwood the wise psychiatrist.

Elwood wonders where Harvey is and, with a furtive glance at his office door, Chumley leads him to believe that Harvey is already downtown. Elwood goes to say good-bye to Sanderson, but Chumley insists that Sanderson is no friend of Elwood's. He also goes on to accuse Veta of conspiring to lock Elwood up. Elwood does not seem at all upset by this revelation. Chumley is boggled at his calmness and asks if he would like him to lock Veta up instead. Elwood says that he would not want that unless Veta wanted it, which he doubts.

Kelly comes in and Elwood gallantly recites a verse of a poem to her. Kelly goes right up and kisses him on the cheek, telling him that she could not be happier. Wilson goes to escort Elwood out, but Chumley stops him. He asks Elwood if women just come up and kiss him often, and Elwood calmly says that sometimes they do. Chumley then exclaims to himself that he must have that rabbit. He asks everyone to come back into the room, and then he tells Dr. Sanderson that he concurs with his diagnosis and would like to administer the formula. First he tells Veta that the formula might have some violent reactions and that he needs Elwood's consent. Veta says that Elwood will give his consent if she asks him to.

Chumley asks Elwood if he will take the formula that the judge points out will cause him to no longer see Harvey. Sanderson points out that instead he will see his duties and responsibilities. Elwood very pleasantly says that he would rather not, but asks Veta if she would want him to take it. Veta says that she loves him and would do anything for him, but that Harvey is only making a fool out of him and she does not want him to be a

fool. She also laments on her and Myrtle's lot in life of having no social life. Elwood says that he has always believed that Veta should have whatever she wants so, if she wants him to take the formula, he will. Chumley directs Elwood to Dr. Sanderson's office, and Elwood instructs Chumley to say good-bye to Harvey for him, Veta, the judge and Myrtle are left alone to wait.

A cab driver comes in and demands that Veta pay him the $2.75 he is owed if she wants him to stick around to take them back. Veta looks around in her handbag but cannot find her coin purse. She asks the judge and Myrtle for some money but none of them has any either. Veta tells the driver that she will get the money from her brother as soon as he is done with his injection. Once the driver hears that the person who is paying him is getting an injection, he is even more insistent that he gets his money now. Veta is alarmed at the driver's rude behavior, but knocks on Sanderson's office door and gets them to send Elwood out.

Elwood comes out and Veta tells him to pay the cab driver exactly what he asks for but no more since he has been very rude. Elwood starts to introduce himself to the driver and shake his hand. He inquires about the driver's family and finds out that he has a brother who also drives a cab. Elwood invites both him and his brother to dinner the following Tuesday. He gives the driver one of his cards, along with the money, before he goes back into the office where Chumley is waiting for him.

The driver observes that Elwood is very sweet. Veta agrees but tells him that he could have waited for his money. The driver, however, says that he could not have because he knows what happens to people after they get injections here. He says that he has driven people to the sanitarium and that, on the way, although they may be a little loony, they are also always the happiest, and most pleasant people in the world. After the injection, however, they become the rudest, angriest passengers he has ever encountered. They never leave tips. Veta insists that her brother, who is very generous, would have tipped him anyway, but the driver says that after the injection all Elwood will be will be a "perfectly normal human being." Veta is horrified upon hearing this and immediately runs to the office door, begging Chumley not to give Elwood the injection. She says that she does not want Elwood to be that way because she does not like people like that. Chumley comes out and asks about what the commotion is. Veta asks if she has given Elwood the injection yet. Elwood walks out, exactly as before, and Veta runs into his arms. Veta is thrilled that Elwood is the same and tells him that she wants all of them to get out of that place. The judge is confused and thinks that Veta does not know what she wants, but Veta now irritably asks everyone what is so wrong with Harvey. She says that if she, Elwood and Myrtle Mae want to live with Harvey, then it is nobody else's business. Elwood, of course, is perfectly content to do whatever Veta wants him to.

As they are about to leave, Veta realizes that her coin purse had been in her handbag this whole time. She understands that Harvey had something to do with its disappearance. On his way out the door, Elwood suddenly sees Harvey in Chumley's office. He politely asks Chumley to step out of his way, and walks out the door, speaking very animatedly to the invisible white rabbit.

Act 3 Analysis

In this final scene of the play, the audience finally gets to find out the philosophy that is at the heart of Elwood's character. In a very poignant line, Elwood tells the doctor that his mother's advice was: "In this world you must be oh, so smart or oh, so pleasant. For years, I was smart. I recommend pleasant." With this line, Chase is asking us to examine ourselves as well as the people around us. Is it true that the only successful people are either smart, which in this case also means ruthless, or kind? Which would you rather be if you had to choose?

Chase shows us that Veta actually has to make this choice. Since Elwood will do whatever she asks him to, it is up to her to decide what he will end up being. The cab driver is used as a device to make us understand exactly what Elwood will become once Harvey disappears. He says that he will be "a perfectly normal human being and you know what bastards they are!" Upon hearing this, Veta realizes that the price for getting rid of Harvey is too high because she, along with the audience at this point, genuinely loves Elwood the way he is. If Harvey makes Elwood the kind and generous person he is, then what harm is in it? This point hides a much deeper laying of meaning for this play. If there is something which is against the norm of society, but which makes a particular person more content and more generous, without harming others, why must we always try to put it down? This can relate to many facets of society, including religious or cultural beliefs. In essence, this play is about accepting people's differences and being respectful of those who live their lives off the beaten track. Harvey is symbolic of all that is unique in each one of us, and Chase is encouraging each of us to find our own way of being every bit as pleasant as Elwood is.

Characters

Ethel Chauvenet

Mrs. Chauvenet is an old friend of the family. She is a member of the town's social circle, which Veta wants Myrtle to break into, and so they both flatter her and curry her favor. She is delighted to see Elwood, whom she has not seen in a while, until he introduces her to Harvey: then, suspecting his sanity, she hastily apologizes and leaves.

Betty Chumley

Dr. Chumley's wife shows up just briefly in Act I, Scene II. Like Veta, she is more concerned with socializing than with science: told that her husband has to examine a patient, she tells him, "Give a little quick diagnosis, Willie we don't want to be late to the party." She has a conversation with Elwood while he is looking for Harvey, and then later, when everyone at the sanitarium thinks that it is Veta who believes in the imaginary rabbit, she mentions his friend Harvey, making them all realize that they have mistakenly committed the wrong person.

Dr. William B. Chumley

Chumley is an esteemed psychiatrist and the head of the sanitarium, "Chumley's Rest," to which Veta has Elwood taken. He is a difficult, exacting man, feared by his subordinates, unwilling to tolerate his mistakes. After a night out drinking with Elwood, though, Dr. Chumley comes to see Harvey, and after that, he discusses Harvey's attributes with Elwood. Told that Harvey can stop time, allowing one to leave their ordinary life for some time and go somewhere else, he describes an elaborate fantasy that has apparently been fomenting in his mind for a long time. In his fantasy, he would go to a campground outside of Akron, Ohio, and live with a beautiful woman, who would drink beer with him and listen to all of his innermost secrets and stroke his head and say, "Poor thing! Oh, you poor, poor thing!"

Elwood P. Dowd

Elwood P. Dowd is the central character of the play, a friendly eccentric who spends his days and nights in the taverns of his unnamed town. Elwood's best friend is Harvey, an invisible six-foot-tall rabbit. The play leaves open several possibilities regarding exactly what Harvey is, whether he is a figment of Elwood' s imagination, as the psychiatrists would like to believe, or he is, as Elwood asserts, a supernatural being known as a pooka. The relevant events in Elwood's past that would account for his relationship with an imaginary, giant rabbit are only hinted at. No information is given about any job he may have ever been employed at, only that he took care of his mother until the time that

she died and that she left "all of her property" to him, which implies that the family is rich and that he may have never worked.

Elwood is a charmer, always pleasant when talking to people, even those who, like Wilson, address him gruffly. He has a stack of calling cards in his pocket and takes one out to offer to each new person he meets. He invites strangers to dinner at his house, including a woman who calls selling magazine subscriptions and a cab driver who brings Elwood's sister, Veta, out to the sanitarium. He is gallant toward Nurse Kelly, picking flowers for her and complimenting her on her beauty.

There are hints that Elwood has known disappointment in his life, and that Harvey may be a manifestation of this. He is clearly displeased with his past when he says to Nurse Kelly, "For you I would do anything. I would almost be willing to live my life over again. Almost." Speaking of the choice between being smart or pleasant, he tells Dr. Chumley, "For years I was smart. I recommend pleasant," indicating a break with the past. The most significant indication of his self-image comes in Act II Scene II, when he describes the "golden moments" that he has with strangers in taverns, who tell him about the big things they have done and that they intend to do, and then, as he sees it, they are impressed with Harvey because he is "bigger and grander than anything they offer me." Harvey gives Elwood hope when he thinks about all of the things that he has not done while wasting his life away drinking.

Judge Omar Gaffney

The judge is an old family friend of the Dowds, a representative of the people in town who are accustomed to seeing Elwood talking to Harvey and who do not think anything of it. He is the family's lawyer; so, when Veta wants to commit Elwood, it is up to Judge Gaffney to arrange the commitment papers, and when Veta wants to sue Chumley's Rest for wrongly committing her, it is also his case to file.

Miss Johnson

Miss Johnson is listed in the Cast of Characters as "a cateress," but her dialog in the play is tagged "Maid." She only appears briefly in the first act: when Veta asks if she has seen the guest list, she says, "No, I haven't Mrs. Simmons," and leaves promptly.

Ruth Kelly

Nurse Kelly is a sympathetic character, a pretty young woman who appears to have some sort of love/hate relationship with Dr. Sanderson. Describing him to Veta, she exclaims, "He's really wonderful " *(Catches herself.)'* 'to the patients." When it seems that they have incarcerated the wrong person, Kelly apologizes and offers to take the blame, but Sanderson meets her concern with sarcasm: "Beautiful and dumb, too. It's almost too good to be true." When they are trying to stall Elwood from leaving, Sanderson suggests that she can captivate him with her good looks, telling her to "go

into you old routine you know the eyes the swish the works." She is simultaneously flattered and insulted. Of the people at the sanitarium, it is Nurse Kelly that Elwood responds to he holds her hand (asking permission first) and recites love poetry to her. Although the play offers no actual conclusion to her flirtation with Sanderson, there is the implication that Elwood's interests will make her more self-confident in the future.

E. J. Lofgren

At the end of the play, it is the cab driver, Lofgren, who makes Veta realize that the treatment that is supposed to make Elwood stop seeing Harvey might drain him of his kind personality. He explains that all of the people that he drives out to Chumley's Rest for treatment are kind and cheerful on the way out, but on the way back, after their treatment, they are angry, mean, and no fun. "J_^ady," he tells her, "after this, he'll be a perfectly normal human being and you know what bastards they are!"

Dr. Lyman Sanderson

Dr. Sanderson is young, for a psychiatrist, but very qualified Dr. Chumley has picked him out of the twelve possible assistants that he tried. He is just as infatuated with Nurse Kelly as she is with him, but he only reveals his concern indirectly. When she tells him to tell Dr. Chumley that the mistake of locking up Elwood was her fault, he says out loud, "I never mention your name," but then adds, when he has moved away from her, "except in my sleep." At the beginning of Act II, Scene II, the two of them have their most direct confrontation, discussing the dates that they saw each other with the previous weekend, but Dr. Sanderson continues to insist that his interest in Nurse Kelly is purely as a psychiatrist.

Myrtle Mae Simmons

Myrtle is a young woman, the daughter of Veta. The main reason why she and her mother are concerned about their standing in the community is that they both are concerned that Myrtle find a man to marry. They are afraid that prospective suitors will be frightened away when they find out that Elwood has an imaginary friend. Myrtle is less charitable about Elwood's odd behavior than Veta, expressing the wish that he might be hit by a truck and making arrangements to sell the house as soon as he is taken off to the sanitarium. Ironically, Myrtle finds a man who is attracted to her because of Elwood's case; she and Wilson, the hospital orderly, fall in love before the play is over. She does have some awareness of Harvey's supernatural existence, because she is the one who explains that whatever Elwood says Harvey predicted actually comes to pass; however, Myrtle is too concerned with herself and her own prospects to think that there is anything too odd about this.

Veta Louise Simmons

Elwood's sister, Veta, is an important character in this play because she joins the play's two opposing forces, logic and imagination. It is her embarrassment with Elwood and her fear that her daughter, Myrtle, will not be able to land a suitable husband because of his eccentricities, that has her take him to Chumley's sanitarium to be committed. Veta throws society functions that are covered by the local newspaper, and she is terrified that her social position will be subject to ridicule or scandal. Elwood embarrasses her. But Veta is a comic character and is just as unstable in her own way as is her brother. In fact, Veta admits at one point that she has actually seen Harvey on a few occasions, indicating that she and her brother share a common state of mind. When she tries to explain Elwood's condition to Dr. Sanderson, she describes Harvey in such a confusing way that the doctor thinks that she is the one who imagines him, and so he has Wilson capture her and lock her up. Veta enlists an old family friend, Judge Gaffney, to sue the sanitarium, but her threat is eventually forgotten. She does, however, empathize with her brother in the end, after the cab driver has told her that the sanitarium's treatment will stop his eccentricity but make him mean and dull, and she interrupts the treatment before it can change him.

Wilson

Wilson is the muscle of Chumley's Rest, a devoted orderly responsible for handling the patients who will not cooperate voluntarily. When Dr. Sanderson thinks that Veta is supposed to be committed, Wilson captures her, carries her upstairs, and undresses her in order to put her in the "hydro-tub " for therapy. He is vulgar and crude and completely devoted to Dr. Chumley, almost frantic with concern when he thinks that Elwood may have hurt the doctor. When he goes to the Dowd house looking for Elwood, Wilson flirts with Myrtle she seems interested in him. When he asks her out in the last scene it is her mother, Veta, who turns him down.

Themes

Friendship

The friendship between Elwood P. Dowd and Harvey is implied in the way that Dowd carries an extra coat and hat for Harvey, in the way that he opens doors and lets him walk through and reads to him. Except for the fact that one of the participants is imaginary, it seems like an ideal friendship. When Dowd tells Nurse Kelly about how he spends his days in bars, or when he promises his sister that he will go to the Western Slope Water Board to apply, he always includes his friend, saying "Harvey and I...." Several times in the play, he phones places looking for Harvey when he is not around. He commissioned a portrait of them together, which is something that only the closest of friends would do. It is clear that this relationship is the most important thing in Dowd's life, and that, like the best friendships, Elwood P. Dowd enjoys being with his friend Harvey, is proud of him, and wants to spend as much time with him as he can.

The play does not answer the question of why Dowd finds the company of an imaginary friend so fulfilling. There seems to be a clue in the fact that he took responsibility for caring for his mother, and then she died. That, according to Veta, is when she first noticed that he was hanging around with Harvey, and it would make sense that caring for an invalid would isolate him from a real social life and drive him deeper into his imagination. But Judge Gaffney, talking to Myrtle in Scene I of Act II, gives the impression that Dowd lost his real friends because he took up with Harvey. When she asks if it is true that he was liked by other men and women, the Judge replies, "Oh, not since he started running around with this big rabbit. But they did once."

Dr. Sanderson, suspecting that Harvey might be a replacement for some friend in his past that Dowd lost, asks him, "Dowd, when you were a child you had a playmate, didn't you? Someone you were very fond of with whom you spent many happy, carefree hours?" Chase's script is not willing to allow his attraction to Harvey to be understood in such simplistic psychological terms: his childhood friend was not named Harvey, but Vern McElhinney.

Sanity and Insanity

This play raises the question of whether believing in something as unlikely as a six-foot-tall rabbit actually qualifies as insanity. At first, the members of the psychiatric profession, represented by the staff at Chumley Rest, think so, and they are willing to commit Elwood and then Veta against their wills, on the suspicion of holding such a belief. According to Dr. Chumley, "the function of a psychiatrist is to tell the difference between those who are reasonable, and those who merely talk and act reasonably." The fact that Dowd is initially considered "reasonable" by the psychiatrists and that his sister is deemed unstable, only to have the diagnoses reversed almost immediately, is an indication that the standards about sanity at Chumley's Rest are none too solid.

The question of sanity is pushed even further when the play offers proof that Harvey actually does exist, as when doors open and close by themselves or the dictionary that Wilson consults has the phrase, "and how are you Mr. Wilson?" If Harvey actually does exist as a supernatural being, then there is nothing at all wrong with the way that Elwood Dowd behaves. In raising this possibility, readers are challenged to not easily accept the notion that talking to an invisible friend equals insanity.

Dr. Chumley, an eminent psychiatrist, believes in Harvey by the last act of the play, and furthermore his belief in Harvey expands his imagination, giving him the freedom to daydream beyond his everyday life. His dream of what he would do with Harvey's help is very specific, down to the name of the girl he would spend his time with and what they would drink (beer, he insists, but not whiskey). If believing in an invisible, six-foot-tall rabbit is to be considered a sign of insanity, then insanity can be considered a sign of a liberated mind that has gotten beyond the troubles of the mundane world. If imagination is insanity, then it seems to benefit the psychiatrist who is supposed to be the gatekeeper of sanity.

Science and Technology

Dr. Chumley's formula 977 is expected to shock Dowd back into reality, so that he does not see Harvey anymore. For his family and friends, this cure offers the hope that Dowd can be returned to normal and can live among other people once again, hold down a job, and become a productive member of society. "If this shock formula brings people back to reality, give it to him," Judge Gaffney recommends. "That's where we want Elwood." All of the characters agree that this would be the best way to treat the problem until they find out that the treatment is not specific. As the cab driver explains, it would not only remove Dowd's hallucinations but also it would remove the pleasant part of his personality as well. Science is unable to distinguish between the part of the mind that hallucinates and the part that makes a person take time to look at sunsets and watch birds. In the end, Veta decides to ignore the recommendation of the scientists and to accept the opinion that is implied in the cab driver's speech, that it is better to have her brother with both his sweet disposition and Harvey than to obliterate them both.

Style

Setting

The scenes in this play alternate between the library of the Dowd mansion and the foyer of the sanitarium. These two settings help to accentuate the different possible ways of looking at Elwood P. Dowd's eccentricities.

Within his home environment, Dowd's behavior almost makes sense. The big, ornate mansion with relics of an earlier time, which the set direction describes as "faded grandeur," gives readers an understanding of his personality even before Dowd arrives. He is a throwback, courtly and generous, with all of his real human relations behind him. In many ways the charade of Veta and Myrtle hosting the Wednesday Forum is as delusional as his association with an invisible rabbit. The way that the ladies scurry out of the society tea when Dowd starts introducing Harvey around, which is odd but not really offensive, is a hint at how distant a dream it is to hope that Myrtle will be accepted into society. The Dowd mansion setting is appropriate to Dowds, but not to others.

At the sanitarium, the mood is not as desperate for social acceptance, but is steeped in scientific objectivity. The actual events that go on there, though, are just as nonsensical at times. The seriousness of the hospital setting is contrasted most sharply in the end by Dr. Chumley, the leader of the institution, cowering in fear of a giant invisible rabbit.

Both sets are described by the script to include several doors. This allows for a chaotic mood, as characters continually enter and leave the stage. The flow of characters kept in constant motion is in keeping with the central question of stability and instability.

Symbolism

Thanks to this play, and the popularity of the subsequent movie adaptation of it, the giant white rabbit has come to represent child-like imagination in American culture. Characters, usually ghosts, that are only seen by select characters almost always symbolize something in literature, such as suppressed guilt or fear or longing. The end of the second scene of Act II of *Harvey* goes to great lengths to eliminate possible ideas that the large rabbit might symbolize to Elwood P. Dowd. It is not a substitute for his father or for a lost childhood friend. The author, Mary Chase, makes sure to show readers that Harvey is not a desperate substitute for something that is missing in Dowd's life. Instead, he functions as the response of a quiet, polite middle-aged man who has always lived at home to the great crimes and accomplishments of others. This makes sense in terms of what Harvey actually is. Rabbits are not thought of as violent or aggressive creatures, and his size, as Dowd explains to Kelly, is a match for anything that others bring into bars with them, "bigger and grander than anything they offer me." Harvey is somewhat of a childish idea because, as the oil painting of him shows, Dowd

sees him wearing a collar and tie: he is not so much like a real rabbit as a cartoon or puppet, which, again, is more symbolic of imagination than of neurosis.

Climax

This play has a false climax and then an even grander climactic moment. At first, it seems that the play has reached its highest point when Elwood Dowd agrees to accept the injection that will make him stop seeing Harvey. The whole play, after all, is focused on their relationship, and his willing participation in shock therapy signals the end of that. The entrance of the cab driver, E. J. Lofgren, seems almost inconsequential at first, because audiences have their attention directed toward what is happening to Dowd.

As it turns out, though, the climactic choice made in *Harvey* is not Dowd's after all, but Veta's. It becomes clear after she stops the injection that this has not been a play about whether Elwood P. Dowd would change, but whether the people in his family would accept him as he is. Looking at it this way, all of the elements lead toward the climax, with the characters in the play divided between those sympathetic ones like Judge Gaffney and Nurse Kelly, who appreciate Dowd and accept his delusion, and those like Myrtle and Wilson, who feel that something must be done about him.

Historical Context

Shock Therapy

Sigmund Freud, considered to be the father of modern psychiatry, became well-known to the American public during the 1920s. His fame started when intellectuals, who heard about the research he was doing in Europe, began undergoing psychoanalysis themselves. From their writings and their life stories, the general populace became familiar with Freud's ideas about the subconscious, an idea that would have perplexed people of earlier centuries, when eccentric behavior was treated as harshly as criminal behavior. Freud's work became familiar, but it was also considered something of a luxury, a hobby that the wealthy could afford to indulge in. In the more extreme cases of mental disorder, science hurried past trying to understand patients and went right for effective treatment of behavior. For severe depression in particular, this meant "shock treatment" (referred to today as "Electroconvulsive Therapy," or "ECT"). ECT proved to have quicker and more certain effects than psychotherapy. It has been controversial since its inception in the 1930s: its supporters claim that ECT offers relief for patients who suffer from emotional instability, while opponents point to side effects deadening of the personality and weakening of the memory. During the 1950s, psychiatry turned to anti-psychotic drugs to help patients cope with delusions, but these too have proven to have negative effects after long-term use. In recent years, a more controlled form of ECT is used in conjunction with drug therapy, showing positive effects with few of the negative ones.

Small Town America

In the 1940s, American culture experienced a notably large population shift away from small towns and toward big cities. This sort of shift had happened before, most notably during the Industrial Revolution of the 1870s and the economic boom of the 1920s, when descendants of farmers were drawn to big cities by wealth. During tight economic times, such as the Great Depression of the 1930s, there was no more attraction to moving to cities than there was to staying put. When America entered World War II in 1941, a need for large quantities of manufactured goods arose, and there was a labor shortage because much of the work force was in the armed service. Large cities drew workers again.

This sort of shifting population is what creates the impersonal attitude that is associated with large urban areas. The small town where Elwood P. Down lives in *Harvey* is large enough to support all of the businesses that he mentions (Charlie's, Blondie's Chicken Inn, Bennie's Drive-in, and so on, not to mention two cab companies and a sanitarium), but it is small and stable enough for a colorful local character to be accepted as part of the scenery. Dowd and his family live off of the accomplishments of a past generation their mother arrived in an ox team and was one of the town's founders. Audiences feeling the pressures of urban growth in 1944 could be nostalgic about a slower pace,

where eccentrics could peacefully while their time away in the dusty library of an old Victorian mansion.

World War II

This play was produced at a time when the Second World War had the nation's attention every day. The war had been going on for several years, and the Allies, led by American troops, were starting to win victories. Germany was being assaulted with bombing raids. D-Day, the huge assault by American and British troops to chase the Axis troops out of France, took place on June 6th of that year. This push went through the summer of 1944, with Paris finally liberated from the Germans. The first signs of the horrors of the Nazi Holocaust became apparent when the Allies entered Maidauck, a concentration camp in Poland, and found gas chambers and crematoriums that were responsible for taking one and a half million lives. *Harvey* opened on Broadway on November 1 st of that year.

Popular entertainment served as a distraction from the terrors of the war. Some plays and films, such as Alfred Hitchcock's *Lifeboat,* worked the war into their plots, but since the outcome was far from determined, most works steered away from the subject, offering audiences lighter, happier fare. Romantic comedies such as those starring Alfred Lunt and Lynne Fontanne were popular on Broadway, while movies favored comedies like *Arsenic and Old Lace* and suspense stories like *Double Indemnity.* Harvey is a good representative of the type of escapist plays produced during World War II as a diversion from news of the war.

Critical Overview

Harvey was a hit with both the public and the critics when it opened on November 1, 1944. One reason that was often cited was the casting of the actors. Critics were especially impressed with Frank Fay, who was an old vaudeville actor who came out of retirement to take the role of Elwood P. Dowd, and with Josephine Hull, who played his sister, Veta Louise Simmons. As Russell Rhodes put it in a review in 1944, "For the remarkable performance of these two, the author and producer should rub Harvey's foot every night in gratitude. Even if he is a pooka."

John L. Toohey's book, *A History of the Pulitzer Prize*, gives a brief summation of some of the notices that ran when *Harvey* first ran on Broadway. Toohey quotes John Chapman in the *New York Daily News* who could hardly contain his excitement: *"Harvey* is the most delightful, droll, endearing, funny and touching piece of stage whimsy I ever saw, and in it Frank Fay gives a performance so perfect that forever hence he will be identified with the character he plays." Toohey also referred to a review in the *Herald Tribune*, in which Howard Barnes noted that "The new play is as wise as it is witty; as occult as it is obvious. It is full of laughter and delicate meaning. It is stage sorcery at its whimsical best." Barnes went on to note that "Frank Fay's performance of the bum is memorable; Josephine Hull's daffy dowager is a performance not to be missed." Toohey also cites an unsigned review in the *New Yorker:* "A work of pure enchantment touching, elegant, and lit with a fresh, surprising humor that has nothing to do with standard comedy formulas. The funniest play in town." Most critics agree that it was a splendid piece of theater art, although there are a few who question its winning the Pulitzer Prize for drama in 1944: that year saw the debut of Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie,* which has survived as one of the most important works written by one of America's most important playwrights.

There were a few negative criticisms, but even these were put within an overall context of reviewers' delight. In an issue *ofPM* immediately after the play's opening, Louis Kronenberger noted that the script has given "something funny to the theater, and something fresh," and for that he is willing to forgive "some pretty serious sins a first act that keeps going way too long, and a last act that, in a sense, can't keep going at all." Kronenberger gave credit to Chase for carrying out "the classic theme of humorists that in wackiness lies the greatest wisdom and the truest happiness." His greatest praise for her, though, is for her creation of Elwood P. Dowd. As with other reviewers, Kronenberger found Fay's performance of Elwood faultless: "Somehow Fay manages to transfix the audience and touch them."

Today, however, the role of Elwood is associated with the actor James Stewart, who played the role briefly in a 1949 revival before committing it to film in a 1950 version that was co-written by Mary Chase. Audiences remember his film performance as one of the best of his long career. Hull repeated her role as Veta for the film, but Frank Fay retired, and is largely forgotten today. David Mermelstein, *of Mr. Showbiz,* identifies the movie as "among the most beloved (pictures) of its era." He gives Mary Chase "a lot of credit," but attributes the picture's success to Stewart's warmhearted performance.

Harvey is still performed regularly today, mostly in community theaters and school productions. The play is seldom studied as a work of literature or included in the anthologies that are used as school texts, but it has not gone out of print. Small theaters are attracted to the play's immediate name recognition, its manageable cast and stage requirements, and its opportunity for at least the two leads, playing Elwood and Veta, to shine.

Criticism

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

Critical Essay #1

*David Kelly is an instructor of creative writing and drama at two colleges in Illinois. In the following essay, he examines the aspects o/*Harvey *that its author has left open to mystery and how unattached, unexplained ideas help to bolster the play's central idea.*

Mary Chase's time-honored play *Harvey* is a fun play to read and to perform. It isn't the type of literary work that cries out to be interpreted. In some ways, the play strains to defy interpretation. One of its central subthemes is that interpretation is a hangup that fun-loving people need to ignore. The play shows an eminent psychiatrist and his staff trying to figure out the reason why Elwood P. Dowd, a mild-mannered drunkard, thinks he sees a giant, invisible rabbit, but it gives its audience enough evidence to believe that he sees it because the rabbit, a mystical spirit, actually exists. There isn't any interpretation called for in explaining Harvey the rabbit, just belief.

There is an element to *Harvey* that goes beyond supernatural explanation, though. Chase teases audiences to see if they can make sense of El wood's mental state. While there isn't enough evidence to explain why he has turned out to be the way he is, there are a lot of loose ends. There are events that might have no significance if *Harvey* occurred in real life but that have to have *some* meaning, because the audience knows that the author put them there. They aren't enough to build a complete psychological profile. They are, however, compelling enough to make readers want to sit down and take another look at the play, pondering what went on in Elwood's life before the action on stage began.

Of all of the strange and seemingly pointless elements that Chase chose to leave in her play, the one that most defies interpretation must be the business of Elwood's calling card. Whenever he meets a new person, he hands them his card. In most cases, as he hands the card over he points to the phone numbers on it, indicating one number the "old one" that the recipient should not call and one that they should.

But why does he have a defunct phone number on his card at all? If the cards had been reprinted since his phone number changed, then he could have left the old number off, and if the new number is just written in by hand then he could have, while writing it, scratched the old one off. And why did he change to a new number anyway?

Most likely, it has something to do with his sister and niece coming to live in his house, but this is only a weak guess that is based on a shortage of other possibilities. He's not likely to have changed phone numbers because of financial reasons, because his finances seem fine and untouched. The fact that he doesn't see his old friends any more since taking up with Harvey appears to be their idea, not his there is no indication that Elwood has ever tried to distance himself from them or shut them out so it is unlikely that he would change his phone number to keep old friends from reaching him. The play only accounts for two important changes in Elwood's life, other than the appearance of Harvey. His mother died, which may well have had great impact on El wood's psyche as Veta explains, "he was always a great home boy" but that would be no reason to

change his phone number. The only other possible explanation is that he changed his number when new people started inhabiting part of his house, even though there are no other hints that he felt any need to protect his privacy against Veta Louise and Myrtle Mae.

It is interesting that Elwood draws attention to the number when he hands his card to Nurse Kelly and Betty Chumley (saying "If you should want to call me."), but in the last act, giving it to the cab driver, he only mentions the address printed on it. This may indicate nothing more than Chase's losing interest in the line, although, for balance, she really ought to follow through with what is started and repeat the line every time that he hands the card out. It might be that Elwood is either chivalrous or romantic by inviting women, but not men, to call him if they should want. One thing is for sure, though, and that is that there is something to this pattern, whether Chase was conscious of it or not. The "new number" is mentioned twice, and that makes it significant.

Even though we are not told what has changed in his telephone situation, we know that something has, and the idea of change in this home boy's life is at the center of the story's dramatic interest. Another big clue to Elwood's mind comes in the second scene of the second act. Nurse Kelly and Dr. Sanderson try to get to the bottom of Elwood's relationship with Harvey, whom they assume is a figment of his imagination. The doctor's attempt to find out why Elwood's mind would project such an imaginary figure fails, of course, because, as the audience is shown several times throughout the play, Harvey is in fact real, not projected. The nurse does better by listening to Elwood and getting him to talk about what Harvey means to him. Elwood's speech about how his invisible friend overshadows the hopes, regrets, and accomplishments of the other bar patrons tells more about the mysteries of Elwood P. Dowd than any therapeutic baths and psychoanalysis that the hospital has to offer him. It may not be clear why Harvey, the magical creature, appears to him, aside from his great, child-like sincerity, but it is clear that having a giant rabbit has been a tremendous boost to Elwood's self-esteem.

There is one more perplexing clue to what Elwood thinks. Early in the play, he makes a mysterious reference to a psychological condition, but Dr. Sanderson passes over the moment quickly, treating it as a joke. It is in the second scene, after Elwood has been institutionalized and then released. Sanderson, fearing that he might sue the asylum, is nervous and eager to please, which may account for his letting go of what seems a very significant hint. Sanderson is trying to explain what "trauma" is, and as an example he offers up "the birth trauma": "the shock to the act of being born."

"That's the one we never get over," Elwood responds. Sanderson, trying to be agreeable, compliments his astuteness and lets the matter drop, missing a chance to really understand what really drives Elwood P. Dowd. Psychiatrists explain that the "birth trauma" is a discomfort felt by all human beings throughout their entire lives, a response to the sudden shock of going from gloating in a sack of warm amniotic fluid to being brought out into the cold air, cut from the umbilical cord, slapped on the bottom, and thrown into an environment of bright lights and harsh sounds. For most people, it is a trauma that is eventually accepted, forgotten, or buried, although psychiatrists might insist that it affects all aspects of life. It certainly means much to Elwood P. Dowd, who

accepts the concept as being natural and obvious. To him, perpetual trauma is the normal state of being.

And so the play *Harvey* presents us with an Elwood Dowd who professes to be familiar with the feelings of the birth trauma, whether he has actually ever heard the concept expressed in words or not. He is a homebody who, according to his old friend Judge Gaffney, "was always so calm about any change in plans," to such an extent that it made the judge suspicious. And he is someone who, for whatever reason, probably the arrival of new people in his house, has changed his phone number, with whatever disruption of his routine is implied with that. This isn't much of a psychological profile, and it certainly does not explain Harvey as a hallucination, but it is enough to explain Elwood's fondness for his big, invisible friend.

And if Harvey's function, not just in the play but in the whole world at large, is not clear enough, Chase shows her audience the effects that he has on people other than Elwood P. Dowd. Among the play's great unexplained oddities, for instance, is Veta's relationship with Harvey. Why does she see him only sporadically, and why is her shouting, "To hell with you," so effective in getting rid of him? Obviously, if Harvey represents childlike freedom, Veta has a childish streak that she is generally able to repress, but not completely. Shouting out an obscenity might seem completely out of character for her, but it is effective precisely because it is so crass, so extreme. The fact that she is as desperate to not see the pooka as Elwood is to see him serves to establish for readers how fearful people usually are of standing out.

The other character who sees Harvey is Dr. Chumley. Like Veta, it is important to Chumley that people not know he sees the invisible rabbit even more so for him, since his career as a noted psychiatrist could be threatened if there were any suspicion about his sanity. Unlike Veta, but like Elwood, the doctor's relationship with Harvey is brought about by heavy drinking. In Dr. Chumley's past, Chase hints at the same sort of personal mysteries that are vaguely insinuated with Elwood. Most telling is his fantasy about what he would do if Harvey overcame time and space and objection for him. He has a particular place in mind, a cottage camp outside of Akron, Ohio it isn't a common vision of paradise, but it is his own. He has a woman in mind, one who would not know his name and would not speak, indicating that the pressure of his professional fame is a burden. She would feel sorry for his burdens and stroke his head in pity. And he would drink only beer, which is a weak alcoholic stimulant, instead of going for the powerful inebriation of strong liquor. Without any more telling background than his professional reputation, these strange, distinct facts paint a touchingly pathetic portrait of Dr. Chumley.

Dr. Chumley is at the center of one of the oddest mysteries in the play, one that nearly matches El wood's new telephone number in terms of its obscurity. Describing his night out with Chumley, Elwood says that the distinguished psychiatrist began disturbing "a beautiful blonde woman a Mrs. Smethills." The doctor claimed to have met her in Chicago, Elwood says, and her escort (conspicuously, he does not refer to the man as Mr. Smethills) issues an implied threat. Nothing more is made of Chicago or Mrs.

Smethills or of their relationship. Like other loose ends in this play, the facts given serve to establish a mood, not to weave a web of reality.

Harvey is full of allusions that shoot out into space, not returning to connect with other points in the play. In another work, this would be a flaw, a sign that the playwright has not fulfilled her mission completely. She seems to have included such details at her own whim, not to complete an artistic design. Whimsy is what this play is all about, though. This is a play about mystery, though, not certainty; about magic, not scientific knowledge; about being pleasant, not smart. Something has to be left beyond the reach of reason, and the disjointed facts that Mary Chase weaves into this play serve to open its audience up to the wonders of possibility that could actually make a giant invisible rabbit exist.

Source: David Kelly, in an essay for *Drama for Students*, Gale Group, 2001.

Critical Essay #2

Brent has a Ph.D. in American culture, specializing in film studies, from the University of Michigan. She is a freelance writer and teaches courses in the history of American cinema. In the following essay, Brent discusses the theme of fantasy versus reality in Chase's play.

The classic comedy play *Harvey,* by Mary Ellen Chase, met with instant popularity on stage, and has remained, along with the movie adaptation, an audience favorite. The six-foot white rabbit who accompanies the wealthy, amiable drunk, Elwood Dowd, has become a staple of American culture, referred to by Stanley Richards as "part of our theatrical folklore." The presence of Harvey is a focal point of the play's central thematic concern with the realm of dreams and the imagination versus the realm of facts and reality. The element of fantasy, and the question of reality, which hovers around the "character" of Harvey, is in part indicated by the differing interpretations offered by critics in regard to Harvey's existence. Richards points out that critics interpreted the existence of Harvey in a variety of ways: "some critics referred to Harvey as an invisible rabbit; others as a rabbit seen only by Elwood; and still others, as an imaginary rabbit." The fact that Harvey is never seen by the audience is important to the effect of the play in maintaining the ambiguity of Harvey's existence. Interestingly, Chase originally included a scene in Act II in which the giant white rabbit actually appears on stage, but was persuaded to rewrite it so that Harvey remains invisible to the audience throughout the performance. Richards describes the last-minute change in staging of this scene:

Since the stage directions specifically stated that Harvey crosses the stage and enters Dr. Chumley's office, an actor garbed in a rabbit's costume played the scene, somewhat to the detriment of the fantasy. Finally, producer Brock Pemberton convinced the author that the rabbit should not be visible to the audience, strengthening the theory that even literal-minded playgoers might accept the idea that Elwood could persuade others to believe in his pooka. In the New York production, the effect of Harvey' s crossing the stage was attained by having a door open, followed by a pause of about eight seconds, then having the opposite door to Dr. Chumley's office open. It became one of the play's more memorable moments.

The decision to maintain Harvey's status as invisible is key to developing the theme of fantasy versus reality in the play. Harvey, clearly, represents the realm of dreams and fantasy, as he is invisible only to those who are dead set on living only in the world of facts and reality. Throughout the play, Harvey's effect on people those who actually see him or who are otherwise affected by his presence is to free them from the bind of facts and reality and to release them into the world of their own imagination. Harvey certainly has this effect on Elwood, who sees him all the time, but also on Dr. Chumley, Dr. Sanderson, Kelly, and even Veta.

Harvey represents the realm of the imagination, dreams, hopes, art, poetry, love, and romance, as opposed to the realm of reality, facts, and science. Elwood clearly values the realm of the imagination above the realm of reality. When Dr. Sanderson tells

Elwood that "We all have to face reality ... sooner or later," Elwood responds that "I wrestled with reality for forty years, and I am happy to state that I finally won out over it." Elwood's ability to see Harvey represents the triumph of his imagination over reality. Elwood and Harvey are also associated with the realm of the imagination as expressed through art and poetry. They are associated with art through the oil painting of the two of them together, which Elwood brings home and places on the mantle piece. This painting later becomes the basis of a discussion on the importance of "dreams" in art (discussed below). Elwood is also associated with the imaginative realm of poetry when he recites a line from Ovid's "Fifth Elegy" to Miss Kelly, "'Diviner grace has never brightened this enchanting face!'" Elwood comments that "Ovid has always been my favorite poet."

Because the audience is not acquainted with Elwood before the arrival of Harvey in his life, one cannot say definitely in what ways the giant white rabbit affected him. However, since Elwood is closely associated with Harvey, it is fair to speculate that Elwood's character represents Harvey's potential effect on other people as well. While Elwood's family sees Harvey as an embarrassment, and others who are introduced to Harvey generally respond to Elwood with something like "horrified fascination," the audience is presented with the character of Elwood as extremely amiable and friendly. Harvey thus seems to bring out in Elwood an openness and warmth toward other people, which dispenses with the usual social barriers of propriety. Elwood responds to everyone he encounters with an immediate offer of warmth, friendship, and companionship, always offering his "card" with the expression, "If you should want to call me ." Elwood even does his best to make friends with someone, who he believes has mistakenly called the wrong number, over the telephone. In Act I, while he is in the library, a phone solicitor calls with the intention of selling membership to a club along with several magazine subscriptions. Elwood responds with, "Oh, you've got the wrong number. But how are you, anyway?" After agreeing to order several subscriptions, Elwood addresses the person on the other end with affection and an offer of friendship, telling her, "I hope I will have the pleasure of meeting you some time, my dear." Furthermore, Elwood's expressions of friendship to everyone he meets are not just kind words; he always makes a point of inviting everyone he meets to join him on a specific date. After the woman on the phone makes what would normally be an empty gesture of telling Elwood that she would like to meet him, he insists, "When? When would you like to meet me, Miss Greenawalt? Why not right now?" Elwood's warmth and openness toward others is in part what made it possible for him to "see" Harvey in the first place, as well as to become his "best friend." Harvey thus represents this approach to social interaction, which values relationships with other people above all else.

To some extent, the power of the imagination of any individual character in the play is proven by his or her ability to "see" Harvey. Those who are in touch with their own imagination can see Harvey, while those who are cut off from their imagination cannot. In addition, a whole cluster of values is associated with this power of imagination. Elwood, or course, represents the character in the play with the strongest imagination. This quality makes him the most likable character in the play. He is warm, kind, and generous to everyone, only seeing the best in them, even if they are rude or unpleasant to him; he considers everyone his friend and treats them as such. Elwood's sense of imagination is further associated with the ability to dream, with the creative element of

the imagination, such as painting and poetry, and even with the capacity for love and romance. At Chumley's Rest sanitarium, Elwood encounters the young Dr. Sanderson and his nurse assistant, Miss Kelly. Miss Kelly is clearly in love with Dr. Sanderson, but Dr. Sanderson fails to "see" her in this light. The cluster of values that oppose the imagination are that of reality, facts, and science. Dr. Sanderson, a psychiatrist, is so preoccupied with the realm of the science of psychology that he fails to use his imagination in his relationship to Miss Kelly. The influence of Elwood, and, by association, Harvey, on Dr. Sanderson is to open his eyes to the potential romance between himself and Miss Kelly. Because Elwood has a strong sense of imagination, he immediately notices and attends to Kelly's feminine charms but only in a very gentlemanly way. When he enters the waiting room at Chumley' s Rest, and Kelly offers him a magazine to look at, he responds that "I would much rather look at you, Miss Kelly, if you don't mind. You really are very lovely." Referring to Dr. Sanderson, Kelly responds that "Some people don't seem to think so." Elwood then comments that "Some people are blind. That is often brought to my attention." Clearly, Elwood is referring to the fact that "some," if not most, people fail to "see" Harvey. He is also indicating that many people lack the imaginative powers to "see" the finer things in life, such as love and romance. Elwood's imaginative powers, particularly in the realm of love and romance, lead him so far as to misinterpret what Kelly and Dr. Sanderson are talking about, to the extent that he thinks they are referring to a romantic encounter that he believes has already occurred between the two of them. In fact, they are attempting to apologize for accidentally committing Elwood to the sanitarium, when they believe they were supposed to have committed his sister, Veta. Miss Kelly and Dr. Sanderson, however, do not even realize that Elwood is interpreting the situation in romantic terms:

Sanderson:... Miss Kelly and I have made a mistake here this afternoon, Mr. Dowd, and we'd like to explain it to you. Kelly: It wasn't Doctor Sanderson's fault, Mr. Dowd. It was mine. Sanderson: A human failing as I said. Elwood: I find it very interesting, nevertheless. You and Miss Kelly here? [They nod] This afternoon you say? [They nod. Elwood gives Harvey a knowing look] Kelly: We do hope you'll understand, Mr. Dowd. Elwood: Oh yes. Yes. These things are often the basis of a long and warm friendship.

Although at this point, though Elwood's perception is a misunderstanding, it demonstrates his insight into their true feelings toward each other. In Act III, Elwood finally has the effect of opening Dr. Sanderson's eyes to his love for Kelly and to her love for him.

Dr. Chumley, the head psychiatrist of Chumley's Rest, while representing the pinnacle of a scientific mind, eventually finds that he, too, sees Harvey. Being able to see Harvey allows Dr. Chumley to get in touch with his imagination in terms of his dreams and fantasies. When this happens, Dr. Chumley regards Harvey as a "miracle." He tells Myrtle, "I've been spending my life among fly-specks while miracles have been leaning on lampposts on Eighteenth and Fairfax," where Elwood first met Harvey. Dr. Chumley later learns from Elwood that Harvey can indeed make it possible for people to live out their own dreams and fantasies. Elwood explains that Harvey has the capacity to "stop clocks," and allow people to "go away as long as you like with whomever you like and go as far as you like." Dr. Chumley then describes to Elwood his fantasy dream of

drinking a cold beer under a tree in Akron, Ohio, with a strange young woman, "Cold beer at Akron and one last fling!" Seeing Harvey thus allows Dr. Chumley access to his own imagination, which brings forth dreams and fantasies which have been denied by his scientific grip on reality. Dr. Chumley even attempts to steal Harvey away from Elwood, hoping that Harvey will allow him to live out this fantasy.

Until Dr. Chumley finally sees Harvey, Veta is the only other character in the play, besides Elwood, who does so. Veta, however, only sees Harvey occasionally. This suggests that she has a potentially strong sense of imagination, but that she does her best to cling to "reality" in denying to others the existence of Harvey. Veta's ultimate belief in Harvey, and thus in the importance of the realm of the imagination, is expressed at two key points in the play. In fact, Veta most clearly expresses the significance of Harvey to the meaning of the play. She does this during a conversation with Dr. Chumley, after he has just seen the oil painting portrait of Elwood with Harvey. During this exchange, Veta's back is turned to the portrait, which she has not yet seen. And yet, she inadvertently expresses the significance of Harvey's image in the portrait:

I took a course in art this last winter. The difference between a fine oil painting and a mechanical thing like a photograph is simply this: a photograph shows only the reality; a painting shows not only the reality but the dream behind it . It's our dreams that keep us going. That separate us from the beasts. I wouldn't even want to live if I thought it was all just eating and sleeping and taking off my clothes. Well putting them on again

The portrait of Elwood with Harvey expresses exactly what Veta has been describing: the "dream" (represented by Harvey) behind the "reality" (represented by Elwood). In the painting, Harvey literally stands behind Elwood, who sits in a chair. Despite this insight, however, Veta continues to deny Harvey's presence in talking to others; her problem is thus not a lack of imagination, but being overly concerned with what other people would think of her if she admitted that she, too, sees Harvey at times.

In the final scene of the play, Veta, Myrtle, the Judge, Dr. Sanderson, and Dr. Chumley prepare to inject Elwood with "formula 977," in order to restore him back to reality. Again, Elwood's imaginative abilities to see Harvey are contrasted with such dull aspects of reality as "responsibilities" and "duties." The Judge tells Elwood that, once given the injection, "you won't see this rabbit any more." And Sanderson adds, "But you will see your responsibilities, your duties " Elwood, however, replies that he "wouldn't care for it." Nonetheless, Veta decides to go ahead with the injection. The cab driver, however, explains to them the effect of "formula 977," which is, essentially, to remove any sense of imagination, leaving people with only a dull and unpleasant grip on "reality." The cab driver explains that, on the way to the sanitarium, before receiving the injection, "they sit back and enjoy the ride. They talk to me. Sometimes we stop and watch the sunsets and look at the birds flyin'. Sometimes we stop and watch the birds when there ain't no birds and look at the sunsets when it's rainin'. We have a swell time." The cab driver goes on to explain that, after receiving the injection, these people become fixated on reality and no longer enjoy life; they "crab, crab, crab. They yell at me to watch the lights, watch the brakes, watch the intersections. They scream at me to hurry. ... It's no fun." The cab driver concludes that, after receiving the injection, Elwood

will be "a perfectly normal human being and you know what bastards they are!" At this point Veta, who has been ashamed of Elwood's insistence on Harvey's existence, realizes that Harvey represents what she likes most about her brother, and other people: their capacity to be imaginative. She concludes that she doesn't want Elwood to be given the injection and forced to exist only in the realm of reality, because "I don't want Elwood that way. I don't like people like that."

Source: Liz Brent, in an essay for *Drama for Students,* Gale Group, 2001.

Critical Essay #3

Herold has a Ph.D. and specializes in the history of dramatic literature. In the following essay, Herold discusses how Mary Chase's Harvey *recycles familiar comic elements, drawing in particular on the ideas of Northrop Frye.*

For a four year old boy to have an invisible friend is nothing extraordinary. However, when the "boy" is a forty-seven year old alcoholic bachelor with a horrified set of relatives, comedy ensues. This simple formula is complicated when other supposedly sane characters also admit to occasionally seeing the invisible friend, a six-foot white rabbit named Harvey. By the end of the play, the question is, who is better off, the sane but anxious Myrtle May or the deluded, pleasant, gentle Elwood? A big audience success, recipient of the prestigious Pulitzer Prize, and mostly glowing reviews, *Harvey* baffles the careful reader by somehow working, in spite of its flimsy premise, creaky construction, and poorly sketched minor characters. Indeed, as Kappo Phelan complained in *Commonweal,* the play could clearly have used another careful revision. Still, more than fifty years later, the play remains popular in amateur and summer stock productions. After all, as one recent review suggests, the central question of the play, "just what is 'normal,' anyway? *[Harvey}* resonates even more with audiences today than it did when the show was new" (Craig).

Written in 1944 during the dark years of World War II, Mary Chase's *Harvey* was intended as pure escapist entertainment, with no deeper meaning whatsoever. The literary student will search in vain for Freudian symbols or profound socio-historic significance. However, like all top-notch comedies (Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* come to mind), the play pokes fun at social mores as well as manages to raise important questions about the nature of perception and reality. In fact, one way to explain the success of the play is that it adheres to conventions as old as comedy itself.

In the words of literary critic Harry Levin, all "comedy recycles the oldest devices." Whether a cartoon, a TV sitcom, a comic novel, or a dramatic entertainment, comedy uses elements as old as the form itself. Character types such as foolish parents, young lovers, braggarts, or clever servants are first found in the comedy of ancient Greece and Rome and have survived to the present day. Psychiatrists like Dr. Chumley, who turn out to be as crazy as their patients, may be a more recent invention, but they are as familiar to any fan of *New Yorker* cartoons as are the ancient characters. Comic targets like pomposity, self-importance, and hype are equally common in the plays of fourth century B.C. Greek dramatist Aristophanes or this week's episode of *Saturday Night Live*. Plots and deeper structures have also remained the same. *Harvey* is part of that tradition, and a knowledge of the traditional elements of comedy will enhance the reader's understanding of this play's enduring popularity.

Certainly, the play has many aspects familiar to students of comedy, in drama and fiction alike. The efforts of the mother, Mrs. Veta Louise Simmons, to introduce her unpromising, plain, and acerbic daughter, Myrtle Mae, into polite society with marriage

as the final goal, are familiar from such works as Austen's *Pride and Prejudice.* In fact, early on, Myrtle Mae is shaping up to be the heroine familiar from countless romantic comedies, whose ability to marry is blocked by the opposing patriarchal force of her uncle Elwood, who controls the family home and fortune. However, this formula is quickly reversed since Myrtle quickly turns out not to be the heroine at all but instead the blocking force. In her single-minded anxiety to marry anyone, at any cost she becomes absurd, as she tries to force her family into line with her obsession and evict her uncle, whom she despises, from his own house. Veta Louise, on the other hand, is equally horrified but also genuinely fond of her gentle brother. Thus, this play cleverly reverses the comic cliche that parents are the conservative proponents of law and order and the children the rebellious advocates of freedom. Here, the older characters are far more tolerant and able to entertain ambiguity than the young, self-righteous characters such as Myrtle Mae, Kelly, and Doctor Sanderson.

The play also pokes some familiar fun at the so-called high society (at least in its own estimation) of the unnamed western city (presumably Chase's Denver) in which they live. To meet eligible young men, Myrtle Mae has to sit demurely through tedious afternoons with old ladies, in hopes of an eventual introduction to their grandsons. In the meantime, she is of course quite capable of looking out for herself, as the reader sees when she quickly hitches up with the socially unsuitable Wilson, the big burly "black-browned" hospital attendant.

The comedy involved in the mistaken identity at the sanitarium, where Doctor Sanderson mistakes Veta Louise for the patient, is also a comic staple, dating back as far as the Latin New Comedy of Terence and Plautus (first century A.D.). Shakespeare also used the trope, for instance in *A Comedy of Errors, A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *Twelfth Night.* In *Harvey,* the comedy arises in part from Dr. Sanderson's distracted interest in the pretty young nurse, which renders his judgment less than professional. Moreover, Veta hilariously mistakes the staff at the sanitarium for white slavers. Adding to the confusion is the inversion of gender roles. In *Twelfth Night,* Shakespeare's heroine, Viola, disguises herself as a young man, promptly falls in love with her boss (the Count Orsino), who thinks he loves Olivia, a young woman who fancies herself in love with the disguised Viola. As Viola sighs, "O time, thou must untangle this, not I / It is too hard a knot for me to untie." In *Harvey,* Veta and Myrtle take on many stereotypically masculine attributes, active and busy, while Elwood is extremely feminized passive, gentle, and reactive. "My sister did all that [attempted to get Elwood committed] in one afternoon," he says wonderingly. "Veta is certainly a whirlwind." Of course, the joke is that by the end of the play, Elwood's way wins out.

The typical comic plot is that it moves from conflict to harmony, from a state of disorder to order. However, to arrive at this order, the middle of the comedy is usually characterized by disorder in a world where all normal values have gone topsyturvy. As critic Northrop Frye has pointed out, in Shakespearean comedy, such as *As You Like It* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* the increased disorder is accompanied by a move from civilized society into a so-called "green world," often quite literally a forest. Here the repressive rules of normal society are relaxed, often through magic, and in the end, after much confusion, the protagonists return strengthened to a redeemed society. A

similar pattern occurs in *Harvey,* which moves from the repressive world of Denver high society, to the topsyturvy world of the insane asylum (with some offstage visits to a few local bars), and then, much improved, back to normal society. Decency and propriety have been defeated; "To hell with decency," says Dr. Chumley, "I've got to have that rabbit!" Moreover, the young lovers have been united, Myrtle Mae has found a man, and Veta and Dr. Chumley have admitted to their own need for an invisible friend like Harvey.

So what exactly is Harvey the rabbit supposed to signify? Apparently as accommodating as his friend Elwood, he is the perfect friend for lonely hearts everywhere. Moreover, he welcomes pleasure, as he appears to spend most of his time partying. He is also a trickster figure who vanishes and reappears as he sees fit. In fact, he is a clear descendant of the vice figure familiar from medieval and Renaissance drama, such as Falstaff, Puck, and Ariel the latter two are also invisible. Yet in spite of the name, the Vice figure is usually reasonably good-natured, his tricks and mischief rarely cause real harm. Indeed, by the end of the play, those characters who can admit to their need for Harvey's company appear far better off than those who continue to deny him.

Thus, *Harvey,* like all comedy, is a celebration of pleasure: a victory of love over duty, freedom over restrictions, fellowship over hard work, community over isolation. City comedies of the Renaissance typically end with a feast, everyone going off to have dinner together. Likewise, Elwood is always inviting near strangers over for dinner. Characters who refuse to join in the good cheer, like Shakespeare' s Malvolio or the judge in Harvey, are banished from the conclusion. In the final scene of the play, this theme is sounded repeatedly. Veta decides to obey her instincts and not have Elwood admitted to the asylum after the cab driver tells her that after treatment, the patients become "perfectly normal human being[s] and you know what bastards they are!" When they are still insane, they "sit back and enjoy the ride. They talk to me.... We have a swell time and I always get a big tip. But afterward oh oh.... They crab, crab, crab.... They scream at me to hurry." Moreover, thanks to Elwood's intervention, the two young lovers are united, with Miss Kelly telling Elwood, "I will never feel happier, I know it." Perhaps Elwood himself states the theme of pleasure most clearly when he recalls his mother's advice:' "In this world, Elwood, you must be oh, so smart or oh, so pleasant'. For years I was smart. I recommend pleasant. You may quote me."

Thus, the "meaning" of *Harvey* is its absence of meaning, its pretense that those who enjoy themselves and live in the moment are better off than the rest of the people who insist on taking life terribly seriously. One can certainly understand why this was a welcome message in 1944, and why it would still seem to resonate today.

Source: Kirsten Herold, in an essay for *Drama For Students,* Gale Group, 2001.

Adaptations

The 1950 film of *Harvey* has become a classic of the American cinema, containing two great performances: James Stewart as Elwood P. Dowd, and Josephine Hull, who played Veta on Broadway and won an Academy Award for her performance as Veta in the film. The screenplay, by Mary Chase and Oscar Brodney, was directed by Henry Koster. Available from MCA/Universal Home Video.

Topics for Further Study

Many of the recent breakthroughs in psychiatry have been in the use of drugs to help with mental conditions. Research one such behavior-altering drug, such as Prozac or Lithium, and determine whether you think that, like formula 977 in the play, it would make Elwood P. Dowd quit seeing Harvey.

At one of the early rehearsals of this play, the producers tried having Harvey appear on stage, with an actor in a rabbit costume crossing the stage for six seconds. Discuss whether you think this would be an effective staging technique or not.

Describe what you would do if Harvey could overcome time and space and any objections for you.

With decreasing tolerance for drunk drivers, the public is less and less inclined to see a chronic drinker as childlike or free-spirited. Do you think that modern audiences would be able to appreciate *Harvey* as much as audiences did when it was first staged in the 1940s?

There is something about Elwood P. Dowd that makes this pooka appear to him as a rabbit. Pick some public figures from politics, sports or entertainment and explain what sort of pookas would appear to them and why.

Stage plays often rely on music to represent something that cannot be explicitly shown. Often, unseen characters, such as ghosts, have specific music associated with them, so that audiences know when they are present. Play an original or prerecorded song to your class that you think could represent Harvey and explain why.

Compare and Contrast

1944: Most of the nations of the world have direct or indirect involvement in the Second World War, which has been going on in Europe for five years.

Today: The nations of the world sometimes become involved in smaller conflicts by contributing peacekeeping forces to group efforts by the United Nations or NATO, but, especially in the United States, war is not the central concern of many.

1944: Excessive drinking is viewed as a harmless pastime that is frowned upon by prudes.

Today: Alcoholism is recognized as a serious, chronic disease.

1944: People fear that the use of drugs to control psychological abnormalities will leave patients as zombies, void of personality.

Today: Even though the use of drug therapy is more widespread than ever before, people still fear that psychologists will prescribe psychoactive drugs unnecessarily.

1944: People receive their daily news from newspapers and the radio. Once a week, they may be able to see film of important events in the news-reels that run at theaters along with movies.

Today: Global link-ups allow instantaneous television broadcasts from anywhere in the world to anywhere in the world.

1944: The National System of Interstate Highways is established by an act of Congress, making it possible to travel across the country quickly by automobile.

Today: Because of the pollution associated with burning fossil fuels, government regulations try to discourage automobile use and encourage the use of public transportation.

1944: Most telephone calls are placed by talking to an operator and telling her who you were trying to reach.

Today: Many telephone calls involve picking options off of a service menu, with no contact to a live person ever being made.

What Do I Read Next?

Ken Kesey's 1963 novel, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest,* also raises questions about whether the people running psychiatric asylums are necessarily more sane than their patients. Kesey's novel shows the cynicism that developed in the twenty years between it and *Harvey:* its protagonist is more like a dangerous sociopath than a lovable eccentric, while Kesey's asylum is a place where victims are mirthlessly drained of all personality.

Arsenic and Old Lace is another comedy about eccentrics that appeared about the same time (it was made into a movie the year *Harvey* appeared on Broadway). It is about two old aunts who invite lonely bachelors home and poison them. The script is available in a 1995 edition, from Dramatists' Play Service.

John Patrick Shanley is a contemporary playwright who shares a sense of the whimsical and the imaginative with Mary Chase. His best works are collected in *13 by Shanley* (1992), available from Applause Theater Book Publishers.

The famous Irish poet William Butler Yates looked into Celtic mythology with his 1892 collection, *Irish Fairy and Folktales,* which may have been one of Chase's sources for information about the pooka. Yates' book is available in a 1995 paperback edition from Barnes and Noble Books.

Shakti Gawain's book *Creative Visualization* (1983) is one of the most influential "self-help" books available, based on the idea that serves Elwood P. Dowd in this play: benefiting from turning the imaginary into reality.

Further Study

Erikson, Erik H., *Toys and Reason: Stages in the Ritualization of Experience,* W. W. Norton [and] Co., 1977.

Erikson, a world-renown psychiatrist, looks at the importance of play to the psyche. His thesis that play is a way of buffering the contact of the self with the reality of the social world might explain Elwood P. Dowd's behavior.

Frommer, Myrna Katz, and Harvey Frommer, *It Happened on Broadway: An Oral History of the Great White Way,* Harcourt Brace, 1998.

The history of the Broadway stage at the height of its greatness is told by actors, authors, producers, and others who have worked there.

Shipley, Joseph T., *The Crown Guide to the World's Best Plays,* Crown Publishers, Inc., 1986,.

A brief overview (pp. 141 2) of how *Harvey* was received when it was first produced and of its cultural significance, along with a list of revivals through the 1980s.

Simon, Neil, *Rewrites,* Touchstone Books, 1998.

More than any other contemporary playwright, Simon comes close to capturing the humorous spirit of Chase's writing. In his acclaimed autobiography he relates some of the background that is involved in mounting a comedy on Broadway.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

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

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

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

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

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

Selection Criteria

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

How Each Entry Is Organized

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

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

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

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

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

Other Features

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We Welcome Your Suggestions

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