Mister Roberts Study Guide

Mister Roberts by Thomas Heggen

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Introduction

One of the more enduring plays to emerge from the World War II era, *Mister Roberts* shows, with a light touch, a side of war that is often forgotten□not the excitement or the heroism of battle, but the boredom of the men assigned to less glamorous work, where one's enemies are as often as not the officers who hold power over them, rather than the soldiers or sailors of the opposing forces.

Author Biography

Thomas Heggen was born December 23, 1919, in Fort Dodge, Iowa, the son of Thomas O. Heggen, a business owner, and Mina Amelia Paulson. In 1935, after the business failed during the depression, the family moved to Oklahoma. Heggen attended Oklahoma City University, Oklahoma A&M University, and the University of Minnesota. In 1941, he graduated with a degree in journalism from the University of Minnesota. In December that same year, Heggen was working in New York City as an editor for *Reader's Digest* when the United States entered World War II. He joined the U.S. Navy a few days later and was sent to an officers' training program at Notre Dame, after which he joined the tanker USS *Salinas*, which operated in the North Atlantic. After a six-month stay in the hospital with a serious hand injury, sustained during a fight with an officer, Heggen was assigned to another tanker, the USS *Agawam*, operating between New Orleans and the Caribbean. He requested a transfer and was assigned as assistant communications officer aboard the USS *Virgo*, a cargo and troop ship in the Pacific. On July 12, 1944, Heggen joined the *Virgo* at Eniwetok, in the Marshall Islands. During the fourteen months he served on the *Virgo*, Roberts wrote a series of amusing vignettes about day-to-day life on the ship.

Following his discharge from the Navy in 1945, Heggen was encouraged by his cousin, novelist Wallace Stegner, to submit his stories for publication. Several of his stories appeared in *Atlantic Monthly* and *Reader's Digest*, at which Heggen had returned to his old editorial job. Heggen then shaped the stories into the novel *Mister Roberts*, which was published in 1946. The book was well received by critics and became a bestseller. The success of the novel encouraged Heggen to adapt it into a play. Not satisfied with his own version, he enlisted the help of stage director Joshua Logan. The resulting collaboration, starring Henry Fonda as Roberts, had a successful three-year run on Broadway, from 1948 to 1951. It also won two Tony awards in 1948, one for best play and one for the authors. The play was made into a movie in 1955, starring Fonda as Roberts and featuring James Cagney and Jack Lemmon.

Heggen, however, was unable to build on his success. Despondent after his 1946 divorce from his wife Carol Lynn Gilmer, whom he had married in 1942, and unable to make progress on new projects, he began to drink to excess and to abuse prescription drugs. On May 19, 1949, Heggen was found dead in his bathtub in his New York City apartment. He had taken an overdose of barbiturates, and the death was ruled a probable suicide, although Heggen left no note. Friends believed his death was an accident, explaining that Heggen, who had been suffering from insomnia, had probably taken the drug and then fallen asleep in the bath.

Plot Summary

Act 1, Scene 1

Mister Roberts takes place aboard the U.S. Navy cargo ship *AK-601*, operating in the Pacific. It begins a few weeks before V-E Day. Just after dawn, as the sleepy crew ignores the reveille call, Roberts reports to Doc that the previous night he observed a Navy task force stretching for miles on the horizon. He shows Doc a letter he has written requesting a transfer to combat duty. He writes these letters every week, but the captain never approves them. Dowdy tells Roberts the men must be given a liberty (time ashore), which they have not had for over a year, since the captain always denies their requests.

The men straggle onto the deck. Insigna discovers he can spy on the female nurses as they shower in the hospital on the island. The men all rush to see, using their binoculars. Mannion and Insigna get into a fight, and Roberts realizes he must get some shore leave for the men, to ease their frustration and boredom. The captain cancels the movie that night because a man was on deck without a shirt, a violation of orders.

Act 1, Scene 2

Roberts tells Pulver his plan to get the men ashore. He has offered a quart of whiskey, which Pulver had been hoarding in a shoebox, to the Port Director, whose job it is to decide where the ship goes next. Pulver is dismayed because he has invited one of the nurses onto the ship, and now he has no alcohol for her. Doc solves the problem by making fake Scotch out of Coca-Cola, iodine, and hair tonic. Roberts teases Pulver that he is afraid of the captain and never carries out any of the pranks he thinks up, such as putting marbles in the captain's overhead so they will roll around and keep him awake at night. In a conversation with Doc, Roberts repeats his desire to see combat. He knows the war is nearing its end.

Act 1, Scene 3

As the men load up a Navy ship with supplies, Roberts disobeys the captain's orders not to give out any fresh fruit. He also allows the men to remove their shirts. The captain summons Roberts, but Roberts sends word he is busy. The outraged captain comes on deck and picks a quarrel. He criticizes the wording in Roberts's transfer request and tells him not to write any more. He orders the men to put on their shirts, but they refuse, until Roberts tells them to do so. The captain tries to punish Roberts, saying that he will be confined to his room for ten days, but he backs down when he realizes that Roberts is indispensable to the running of the ship. The men are delighted to have observed Roberts getting the better of the hated captain.

Act 1, Scene 4

Pulver brings the nurse Miss Girard onto the ship. He pretends to have seen combat action and to be the executive officer. He tries to take her to his cabin, but on the way, they run into the men. Insigna makes a remark that reveals the men have been spying on the girls. Miss Girard verifies with a pair of binoculars what has been happening and promptly leaves, saying she has promised to help the girls put up curtains. The men are disappointed that their sport has ended, but Roberts cheers them up by announcing that they are going to Elysium Island, where they will have shore leave.

Act 1, Scene 5

As the ship approaches Elysium, the men eagerly anticipate getting off the ship. But the captain announces that because of cargo requirements and security conditions, there will be no liberty.

Act 1, Scene 6

In the captain's cabin, Roberts demands to know when the crew will be allowed to go ashore. The captain replies that the only way the crew will get liberty is if Roberts stops writing letters requesting a transfer. The captain hates Roberts but needs him. If Roberts leaves the ship, the captain will not be able to attain promotion to the rank of commander. Roberts at first refuses to go along with the captain's plan, but eventually agrees to it. The captain also gets him to promise not to talk back to him in front of the crew, or to tell anyone of their meeting.

Act 2, Scene 1

It is 3:45 A.M., and the men straggle back from shore leave. Some are drunk, while others have been injured in fights that resulted after they gate-crashed a dinner-dance for Army personnel. Roberts deals with them mildly, allowing some of the men to go back ashore. He is pleased with them because they have bonded as a crew. After more trouble ashore, the captain is ordered to report to the Island commander.

Act 2, Scene 2

The captain tells Roberts they are being kicked out of the port. He orders the men to work harder and hints to Roberts that he might get a promotion if he does a good job. He gives Roberts some orders, which Roberts obeys, to the consternation of the men. Dolan produces a bulletin that says there is an urgent need for experienced officers aboard combat ships. But Roberts is reluctant to sign the letter Dolan has typed for him. The men do not understand why.

Act 2, Scene 3

The crew think that Roberts has buckled under to the captain because he wants a promotion. He has also put Dolan "on report," a disciplinary measure, which has further upset the men. Roberts begs Doc to transfer him to the hospital on the next island, but Doc refuses. After they hear an announcement on the radio that the war in Europe is over, they call for a celebration. Pulver tells of his latest scheme, to throw a firecracker under the captain's bunk. He goes to the laundry room to test it, and there is a tremendous explosion. He returns, unhurt but covered in soapsuds. Roberts wants to make another firecracker, but Pulver says he has no more materials. He is disappointed that he has let Roberts down.

Act 2, Scene 4

The men are cold towards Roberts. He apologizes to Dolan and takes him off report, but the men remain unfriendly. After the men exit, Roberts takes the palm tree from the container and throws it over the side. The captain enters, notices the absent palm tree, and orders the crew to battle stations. He demands to know who did the prank and guesses it was Roberts. Roberts denies any knowledge of it, and the captain gets so worked up he makes himself ill. After Roberts leaves the captain's cabin, the men once more treat him with respect.

Act 2, Scene 5

Roberts has gained his transfer, but he does not know how. Dolan tries to convince him that one of his old letters was finally approved, but Doc reveals that the men wrote a letter for him, forging the captain's signature. The men enter and give him a going-away present, a brass medal shaped like a palm tree, attached to a piece of gaudy ribbon.

Act 2, Scene 6

Some time has elapsed. The men are reading their mail. Pulver reads a letter from Roberts, dated three weeks earlier. He is aboard a destroyer that has been subject to four air attacks at Okinawa. He is happy to be in the war at last. He keeps the "medal" his men gave him on his desk, saying he would rather have it than a Congressional Medal of Honor. Pulver then reads another letter he has received from a friend who serves on the same ship. The letter informs him that Roberts is dead, following a Japanese suicide attack. Pulver throws the palm trees over the side, goes to the captain's cabin, and announces what he has done. Then he challenges the captain about why there is to be no movie that night.

Act 1, Scene 1

Act 1, Scene 1 Summary

Set in the final days of World War II, this play is the story of two sailors on a U.S. Navy supply ship, a cargo officer desperate to see front-line action and an ensign who learns important lessons about responsibility from the first. Rich in gritty atmosphere, the play explores themes related to the value of individual integrity, compassion, and respect.

The first scene is set in the amidships area of the ship. As reveille sounds, Roberts enters, making notes on a piece of paper. Doc enters, explaining to a surprised Roberts that on days when there's a lot of work several men will pretend they're sick, and that he's up early to be ready. He senses that Roberts is preoccupied, but when he asks what's going on, Roberts doesn't answer. Doc makes small talk about a conversation he had with Ensign Pulver the night before, in which Pulver told somewhat unbelievable tales about his sexual prowess, and then again asks Roberts what's wrong. Roberts tells him that the night before, when he was on watch, he saw a formation of battleships in the distance and when he turned away, the first thing he saw was the Captain's palm tree, apparently a trophy for excellence in delivering supplies like toilet paper and toothpaste.

The implication is that he sees the ship's role in the war as being inferior. He hands Doc the paper he's been writing on, saying it's his application for a transfer and talking about how desperate he is to get into combat. Conversation reveals that Roberts has written several similar requests, the Captain has rejected every one, but Roberts believes this one is different because the wording is much stronger. Doc reads it aloud and then says Roberts doesn't have much chance. Roberts grabs the letter back, saying any chance is still a chance. Doc exits, saying he wishes Roberts hadn't seen those battleships.

Dowdy enters, comments on the heat, and refers to the nearby island. He asks Roberts whether there's any possibility the sailors will get over to it for liberty, saying the men haven't had one for over a year. Roberts says he asked the night before and was told no. He then hands the letter to Dowdy, telling him to get Dolan to type it.

As Roberts exits, Dowdy shouts to the sailors that it's time to get moving. As they enter, groggy and resentful, Dowdy hands out their assignments for the day, which include cleaning the spyglasses. As the sailors settle into their jobs, one of them looks through a spyglass, notices a new hospital building on the island, and discovers a room where female nurses are showering. The men jostle to take turns at the window and with the spyglasses, becoming excited as they watch a nurse with a birthmark on her bottom who appears to be one of a set of twins. Suddenly, one of the sailors shouts a warning, "Flash Red," and the sailors make themselves look busy. The Captain enters, passes through, sees what he believes to be hard-working men, and exits again. The other sailors ask a sailor named Mannion, who's again looking through the spyglass, whether the nurses are back. Mannion says no, but because he's obviously watching something,

the other sailors crowd around. When they realize he's been watching a nurse get dressed, they become angry, and one of them, Stefanowski, loses his temper. A fight begins, and all the men take sides.

Roberts and Dowdy enter and break up the fight, and Roberts orders the men back to work. Dowdy says again the men have got to have liberty, and Roberts agrees, saying he's thought of a new way to make it happen. He and Dowdy exit.

As the scene changes, several announcements are made over a loudspeaker. These include reference to a captain's order that all the men wear their shirts on deck.

Act 1, Scene 1 Analysis

This scene principally consists of exposition and foreshadowing, establishing the play's context and setting up several story elements that will be developed as the action unfolds. A key component of the former is the use of realistic details like reveille (a trumpet fanfare used to wake members of the armed forces), dramatizations of how the chain of command works (indicating who gives what orders to whom and who has direct contact with the men), and the announcements over the loudspeaker. All these combine to create an evocative atmosphere of strict order and expectation against which the efforts of Roberts and Pulver to create a sense of independence and individuality are an effective and thematically relevant contrast.

Another way in which the atmosphere has the ring of well-researched authenticity is in the use of military terminology. It's unclear whether the term "Flash Red" is genuinely used on ships like the unnamed vessel this play is set on, but its use in the context of so many other realistic expressions gives the sense that it at least could be. The most important value of this expression, however, is defined by its usage. At this point and throughout the play, it is used to warn the men when authority figures are approaching, indicating that the men need to look not only busy but also as though they respect that authority and are placing themselves into subservient positions. This idea is important since Roberts, for most of the play, is treated casually, as one of the men even though he's an officer. Later, however, when the crew believes him to be trying to gain a promotion, when he appears they use the term "Flash Red." Later in the play, the term indicates a change in Roberts' status, which in turn, triggers changes in the plot. The appearance of the term here, therefore, is an important piece of foreshadowing.

Other important foreshadowing in this scene includes Roberts' request for a transfer, which both initiates and foreshadows the development of the play's central plot, and the references to the Captain's palm tree, which plays a role in the development of both plot and theme. Another example is the reference to Pulver, who is the play's second central character and appears for the first time in the following scene. The references to the heat and, in the announcements at the end of the scene, to the Captain's order that shirts be worn on deck are also a foreshadowing of elements in a secondary conflict that triggers developments in the main plot concerning Roberts' transfer request. The references to the nurses, including the reference to the birthmark, foreshadow an

important scene later in the play when one of the nurses actually appears and triggers still more conflict among the men.

The palm tree is the play's major, and perhaps only, symbol, representing the Captain's foolish, selfish ambition and need for authority. References to it in this scene foreshadow both the struggle that Roberts continually has with that authority, and the destruction of both the authority and the tree later in the play.

Act 1, Scene 2

Act 1, Scene 2 Summary

This scene is set in the stateroom shared by Roberts and Pulver. Dolan enters, saying he has prepared Roberts' letter. He discovers Pulver looking into Roberts' locker, and Pulver explains he's looking for a shoebox that was taken out of his locker. Dolan tells Pulver to tell Roberts to sign the letter as soon as he gets back from the island, commenting that it is the best transfer request Roberts ever wrote. Pulver glances over the letter as Dolan talks about how the Captain becomes nauseated whenever he gets angry at Roberts and says that when he sees this letter, the Captain is going to need a bucket. Dolan exits. Pulver finishes reading the letter and hides it under a blanket.

Pulver is cleaning up Roberts' locker as Roberts and Doc enter. Roberts asks Pulver whether Dolan has brought the letter, and Pulver says he doesn't know. Roberts goes back to the story he was telling Doc, saying that after he broke up the fight, he realized he had to do something and went across to the island with a bottle of scotch whisky to give to the Port Director, along with a request for liberty for the men. Conversation reveals that the whisky was in the shoebox that Pulver was looking for, and that he was saving it to serve to a particular nurse he wanted to be with who happens to love scotch whisky. He talks Doc and Roberts into helping him create something that tastes like scotch, and they put together a mixture of medical alcohol, Coca Cola for color, iodine for taste, and hair tonic for age. They taste it and agree that it tastes something like scotch, and Pulver says the "dumb little blonde" won't know the difference.

As Pulver happily looks forward to his success with the nurse, he talks about how Roberts and Doc are always so good to him. Roberts comments that Pulver almost deserves it. When Pulver asks what he means, Roberts says he thinks he's a great guy, but that he's also lazy, disorganized, preoccupied with sex, and scared of the Captain. He also talks about all the plans Pulver makes for pranks on the Captain, none of which come to fruition. As Pulver pulls out some of the things he's planning to use on one of his pranks, Roberts says that the day that Pulver follows through on one of his plans and has the guts to confess is the day that he (Roberts) will actually respect him.

Pulver responds angrily, but Roberts ignores him, turning on the radio and listening as an announcer refers to the action of the war in Europe. Unable to listen for long, Roberts angrily shuts off the radio and asks where Dolan is with his letter. Pulver tries to talk Roberts into not sending it, saying that he's too good a friend to let go, but then he repeats a phrase in the letter. Roberts realizes Pulver knows where it is and demands to see it. Pulver pulls it out, explaining that he hid it because of something Doc said the night before about Roberts being stupid for chasing death. When confronted by Roberts' demand that he explain, Doc refers to his comment the previous night that anyone who doesn't want to fight in the war is only half alive. He also refers to Roberts' having quit medical school, which leads him and Roberts to argue over the best way to save lives, becoming a doctor or fighting a war. Doc comments that their ship does a necessary job

and that Roberts is a necessary part of getting that job done well, but Roberts says he fears that he and the other men on the boat are on this assignment because they're actually cowards and unable to fight. He says he needs to feel good enough to participate in the fight, but Doc says he's more than good enough; he just doesn't have the opportunity. He describes the desire to fight as a reflex and says even Pulver has it. Roberts says Doc has made his point, but that he's still going to send his letter.

As Roberts exits, Pulver tells Doc he's going to prove Roberts wrong and play a prank on the Captain, getting the supplies together to create a firecracker and putting it under the Captain's bed. Then after it goes off, he will confess that he did it.

As the light fades, offstage voices are heard shouting orders back and forth as the ship unloads its cargo.

Act 1, Scene 2 Analysis

The principal function of this scene is to introduce and define Pulver, an important character who undergoes a thematically significant journey of transformation as the play progresses. He is the central character in the play's principal sub-plot, a term describing a secondary story line that illustrates or illuminates the main plot either by contrast or repetition. In this case, the sub-plot is a contrast to the main plot, which is centered around Roberts.

Throughout the play, Roberts has a clear sense of purpose and integrity. This scene and several others portray Pulver as Roberts' opposite: lazy, irresponsible, and shallow. As a result of Roberts' influence and example, detailed by the action of the main plot, Pulver recognizes the value of both duty and responsibility and changes his own behavior and attitudes. In other words, his journey of transformation makes up the action of the sub-plot. It also reiterates the key thematic point, primarily developed in the main plot focusing on Roberts, that a man's first obligation is not to himself or authority, but to the well-being of others.

This theme is developed primarily through the action later in the play when Roberts personally suffers to gain liberty and other benefits for men who work under him. In this scene, however, it's developed through the argument between Doc and Roberts in which Roberts' contention seems to be that the obligation to general well-being is best served by fighting in a war, as opposed to working in a hospital. Ultimately, the belief at the core of both the action and the argument is the same--that sacrifice of oneself for the ultimate good of others is noble and worthwhile and that such sacrifice is an essential manifestation of the obligation to the well-being of others.

There are three important elements of foreshadowing in this scene. The first is Dolan's reference to the Captain's nausea, which foreshadows the intense vomiting the Captain experiences in his final confrontation with Roberts in Act 2, Scene 4. The second is the reference to the arrangements Roberts made for a liberty, an action that comes back to haunt him several times and in several ways later in the play. The third is the reference

to the firecracker, which itself plays an important role in the action in the second act, and which is the focus of Pulver's determination to overcome his much-ridiculed procrastination, an important component of his journey of transformation.

Act 1, Scene 3

Act 1, Scene 3 Summary

This scene is set on the ship's upper deck as Roberts oversees the unloading of cargo. The sailors' shirts are sweat-stained, indicating the heat of the day. A messenger tells Roberts that the Captain's orders are to not release any fresh fruit because he wants it for himself. The Messenger also reveals that Dolan has just taken Roberts' transfer request in to the Captain. As the Messenger goes, Dowdy asks Roberts whether the men can remove their shirts, saying one sailor has already passed out from the heat, and others are likely to follow. Roberts reminds him of the Captain's orders that all men must wear their shirts on deck, but then he gives his permission for them to take them off. An officer from the ship receiving the supplies asks whether there's any fresh fruit available, saying they haven't had any for 2 months. Roberts tells Dowdy to give them a couple of crates of oranges, and Dowdy goes off to make the arrangements. The Messenger returns with an order from the Captain for Roberts to see him. Roberts says he's too busy doing his job, and the Messenger goes.

Shortly afterwards, as Roberts and the other men are shouting orders to complete the transfer, a sailor shouts out "Flash Red" and the Captain appears, angry that Roberts refused his order. As they argue, sailors appear, not wearing their shirts and pretending to work but actually listening in. The Captain refers to Roberts' letter, and speaking in language that sounds less educated than Roberts,' says he's not going to let his reputation with his commanding officers be damaged by what he sees as Roberts' repeated attempts to make him look bad. He orders Roberts not to write any more letters, and then notices that the men have removed their shirts. He orders them to put them back on, calls what they've done insubordination, and puts them on report. The men don't move, only putting on their shirts when Roberts tells them to. Roberts then reveals that it was on his orders that the men removed them in the first place, saying it was too hot and explaining that one man passed out. As the Captain reacts even more angrily, the officer from the other ship offers his thanks for the fruit. As Roberts explains about the other ship's need, the Captain cuts him off and confines him to his quarters. Roberts starts to leave, but then the Captain realizes he's in the middle of a job and orders him to stay and report to his quarters when he's finished.

As the Captain turns to go he spots Pulver and calls him over. Flustered, Pulver salutes. The Captain comments on how he's the only officer that does salute him, and on how he never sees him around, which he takes to mean that Pulver is always busy doing his job. As Roberts hides his laughter, the Captain invites Pulver to lunch with him. Pulver says he can't; he's going over to the hospital on the island to pick up a piece of equipment. Roberts says he'll take care of it. Pulver says he doesn't want anybody else to do this particular job, and the Captain says they can have lunch some other time. Pulver salutes again, and the Captain exits. Roberts jokingly salutes Pulver, who reacts angrily and exits. Roberts then turns to the crew, who indicate their support for him and

argue over who gets to take the next application for transfer into the Captain. Roberts orders them to get back to work.

Act 1, Scene 3 Analysis

The central point of this scene is to introduce the character of the Captain, define him in contrast to Roberts, and establish their ongoing conflict. All of this takes place within the context of Roberts' repeated defiance of the Captain's orders, which illustrate how compassionate Roberts is and how selfish and insensitive the Captain is. The illustration is unsubtle to say the least, with not one, not two, but three acts of defiance on Roberts' part: the transfer request, the transfer of the oranges, and the order about the shirts. Obvious or not, the contrast clearly and vividly makes the thematic point that compassion and concern for others is a much more worthy characteristic than incompetent self-centeredness, as embodied by the Captain. It's interesting that he connects with Pulver in this scene, since the men appear to be more than slightly similar in character. Pulver's determination to go over to the island is the most apparent example of this here, since we understand him to be not interested in the hospital but in one of the nurses working there.

Act 1, Scene 4

Act 1, Scene 4 Summary

In the amidships area, Pulver brings in Miss Girard, the nurse from the hospital, whom he's guiding through the ship. After talking about how much action the ship has seen, with Pulver lying and saying the ship's seen a lot of battles, he proposes that they go to his cabin and drink the scotch he's got. Miss Girard talks about her love for scotch, and about the nickname "Red Label," given to her by her sister because of a certain personal characteristic (which the audience understands as a reference to the red birthmark). As Pulver laughs, Miss Girard asks why. Pulver says he doesn't know what she's referring to and that he never will. He talks her into going with him to his cabin, but as they're leaving, the other sailors arrive from another direction, pull out their spyglasses, and look through the window at the hospital. Miss Girard asks what they're looking at. Pulver tries to lead her out, but the other sailors have them hemmed in.

Roberts comes in, Pulver introduces him to Miss Girard, and she asks what he does, referring to Pulver's job as executive officer (which we understand to be Roberts' job). Roberts says he's laundry officer (Pulver's job), and Miss Girard says she's just been made laundry officer for the nurses. As two of the other sailors begin a whispered argument, Miss Girard asks Pulver to invite Roberts to join them. Pulver says Roberts doesn't like scotch. As Roberts and Miss Girard joke about how they prefer medical alcohol and orange juice to any other drink, the argument between the two sailors suddenly becomes loud and one of them bets $100 that Miss Gerard IS the nurse "with the birthmark on her ass."

Miss Girard takes a spyglass, looks over at the island, and asks Pulver to call her a boat so she can go back to the hospital, saying that she and the nurses had talked about putting up some curtains and that they'd better do it immediately. She then exits, followed by Pulver. As the soldiers begin to argue over whose fault it is that they've lost their view of the hospital, Roberts calms them down by revealing their new orders: to sail to the Polynesian port of Elysium and have liberty. Roberts reveals that only one man on the ship has been to Elysium and can tell them what it's like. When he reveals it's Dowdy, the other sailors run off to find him. Roberts picks up a spyglass and looks over at the hospital.

Act 1, Scene 4 Analysis

Aside from injecting some welcome humor into the action, and following through on the foreshadowing relating to the nurses and the birthmark, there are two important aspects of this scene. One is the further delineation of the character of Pulver, who is revealed to be just as obsessed with sex as Roberts said he was. This again indicates how shallow he is, and how much in need he is of developing the same sense of responsibility that Roberts seems to have come by naturally. The second important

aspect of this scene is the mention of Elysium and liberty for the men, which foreshadows much of the conflict in the remainder of the play. Elysium, in classical literature, was another word for "heaven." By using the word in this context, the playwrights are defining the characters' perspective on their destination. The sailors clearly see where they're headed and what they plan to do there as paradise. As the action of the following scenes reveals, the term is definitely ironic, since Elysium turns out to be anything but paradise.

Act 1, Scenes 5 and 6

Act 1, Scenes 5 and 6 Summary

Scene 5--In the bunkroom below decks, the sailors make preparations for their liberty: shining shoes, shaving, combing their hair, etc. Dowdy, who sits in a corner reading a magazine, is the only one who appears calm. As the sailors look out at the island, talking about how beautiful it looks and about their plans, their conversations reveal that the men have been ready for a long time and are waiting for the order to go ashore. Dolan enters with news that the Captain is still asleep and hasn't yet issued the order for the men to leave. One of the sailors angrily says he's going to go wake him up, but Dowdy tells him to be patient, saying that if the Captain wakes up in a bad mood, the liberty isn't going to happen. Dolan is called back to the Captain's cabin, which the sailors take as a sign the liberty is about to begin. They complete a flurry of last-minute preparations, but then the Captain's voice comes over the loudspeaker. After figuring out how to make the microphone work, he announces that because of security concerns and cargo requirements that have just come to his attention, there will be no liberty. He signs off, and the lights shift ...

Scene 6--... to the Captain's cabin just as he's finishing his announcement. He looks at his watch as though timing something, nodding as Roberts comes in demanding to know why liberty has been canceled. The Captain says liberty wasn't his idea, indicating that he knows it was arranged by Roberts' giving the Port Director a bottle of scotch as referred to in Act 1, Scene 2. He admits to being a little "pre-voked" by this, but then says he realized that the time had come to have a talk with Roberts. After references to his own ambition, to his successes as represented by the palm tree, and to his knowledge that Roberts' skills can help to take him where he wants to go, the Captain says that the only way the men will get their liberty is if Roberts promises to write no more letters. Roberts loses his temper, swears at the Captain, and condemns him for essentially imprisoning the men. The Captain says Roberts deserves a court martial, and Roberts says he welcomes one, adding that there has to be a witness and promising to say exactly what he just said before any witness the Captain names. The Captain doesn't respond directly, but in a long speech reveals his resentment of college-educated men like Roberts, talking about how he suffered the insults of people like him all his life but now he doesn't have to take it any more. He shouts that because he's the Captain, everybody else has to do what he says. He finishes by saying the liberty is canceled and that Roberts is never going to get a transfer, ordering him to leave his quarters. Roberts refers to the music coming from Elysium, and asks the Captain what he wants so that the men can have liberty. The Captain says he wants Roberts to stop writing letters and disobeying his orders, speak respectfully, and keep their conversation a secret. Roberts gives his word, the Captain comments on how "college fellas" always keep their word, and then says they've got a deal. He picks up the microphone and announces that the entire crew is now at liberty. After he switches off the microphone, Roberts comments on how happy the sailors sound, and we hear them as they sing and the lights fade.

Act 1, Scenes 5 and 6 Analysis

The symbolic conflict between compassion and selfishness, embodied in Roberts and the Captain, becomes personal in Scene 6, the emotional and thematic climax of the act. While not explaining the reasons for his selfishness and foolishness, the Captain's speech does explain his personal resentment of Roberts and also serves to define just how selfish he actually is. For him everything seems to be about revenge and personal glory, two goals that are selfish by definition. As such he couldn't be a greater contrast to Roberts, who in this scene reveals the depths of his compassion and of his readiness to sacrifice himself for the good of others.

It's interesting to note that the confrontation between Roberts and the Captain centers on the issue of "liberty." The Captain, in this scene, is shown to be an opponent not only of the sailors' liberty, but of liberty in general: the freedom to choose, the freedom to be free, and the freedom to live a responsible life. All these are traditional American ideals, as are the other characteristics embodied by Roberts such as a sense of justice, personal integrity, and individuality. This last is perhaps most important, given that in American society, American culture, and American art there is a tradition of respect for the rebel, a respect that almost becomes a reverence for personal characteristics like independence of spirit, the capacity to blaze trails, and the courage to disregard criticism from others. It may be, in fact, that Roberts is a hero in the tradition of the many social, political, cultural, and racial pioneers who have defined America in the image of that independence, meaning that his struggle is not only individual but archetypal, or representative of a larger spiritual truth. In this case, that truth is the thematically relevant premise that independence of spirit, tempered by compassion for others, is a personal and social ideal.

Act 2, Scene 1

Act 2, Scene 1 Summary

As the scene begins, Roberts issues orders to guide a cargo net onto the deck. As the lights come up, the audience sees what's in the net: unconscious sailors. There are more unconscious sailors on the deck, all being treated by Doc. Dowdy and other sailors carry them down to sick bay as conversation reveals it's full to overflowing since seven groups of sailors have been returned to the ship in similar condition to those in the net. A Shore Patrolman enters with four more sailors, revealing that they crashed a formal dance and started a fight with over a hundred soldiers. As the sailors enter, disheveled and bloody, a Military Policeman reveals that the dance was sponsored by an Army Colonel, who has demanded that the Captain be told everything that happened. The sailors proudly say they started the fight, and the MP reveals that 38 soldiers are in the hospital, the Colonel himself was badly bruised, and several young women from high-profile families on Elysium were either injured or frightened away. He adds that the Colonel is demanding to know what punishment the men will face. Roberts tells him that that will be up to the Captain. After the MP exits, the Patrolman comments on how negatively the Colonel is viewed on the island, and goes.

The sailors ask permission to go back to the island. Doc gives them the medical all clear, Roberts tells them to shower and change, and the soldiers excitedly go out, talking about getting back to the dance. Doc exits to sick bay to check on his patients as Dolan enters. Dolan says he's as drunk as a goat and is pulling a goat along behind him. He says he saw the goat chewing on a palm tree and brought him to the ship as a mascot, pointing to the Captain's palm tree and telling the goat to go ahead and eat it. Roberts tells Dolan to go to bed and that he'll take care of the goat. After Dolan exits, and after an impatient officer assisting Roberts is relieved, the Patrolman enters, looking for the goat. Roberts hands it over, and the Patrolman exits.

Roberts asks a returning sailor, Wiley, how his liberty was, and Wiley just smiles. Roberts smiles back just as Doc enters and asks why he's so happy. Roberts says that for the first time he's seeing a crew, rather than a bunch of individuals, that they're now strong enough to take on whatever is facing them for the remainder of the war, and that he hopes he's just as strong as they are. Doc says the next day he and Roberts are going to go across to the island and have a liberty of their own.

Pulver appears, saying he's broken his record for sleeping with women. At the same time, another Patrol Officer appears, saying guards have been posted to enforce an order that the ship is restricted, which means there will be no more liberties. He also says the Captain is expected at the office of the Island Commander the following day. When Roberts asks whether there was anything in particular that triggered the Commander's anger, the Officer says several men from the ship broke into the home of an ambassador, created a disturbance, and did physical damage. This all happened because an Army man had apparently told them it was a brothel, and they were angry.

He says the Commander has called the ship the worst he's seen in his entire career, salutes, and goes out. As Doc exits to sick bay, Wiley comments that even though the liberty is cancelled, it's worth it because it was such a good time. Roberts agrees.

Act 2, Scene 1 Analysis

There are two key components to this scene, the first dramatically important and the second thematically important. The first is the increase in the pressure on Roberts, since it was he who insisted the men be given liberty. Because of what we've seen of his relationship with the Captain to this point, it's easy for us to understand that the Captain will find some way to manipulate Roberts as a result of everything the sailors did. As the action progresses, we'll see exactly how this plays out, with the following scene illustrating that the Captain has a trick or two that Roberts isn't expecting.

The scene's second purpose is to illuminate the play's secondary theme celebrating individuality and the spirit of independence. This is suggested by showing several ways in which apparently self-important authority is flaunted, including the recounting how the sailors invaded what sounds like a stuffy and pretentious dance, Dolan's desire to let the goat go after the Captain's palm tree (which, as we've seen, is a symbol of the Captain's selfishness and unearned reputation), and the invasion of the ambassador's home. The idea that such lack of respect for such authority is a good thing is supported by Roberts' comments on the way the men on the ship are now a crew, a team, instead of a bunch of individuals. The argument could be made that he makes this point because he recognizes that the sailors have blown off some steam, releasing energy bottled up because they've gone so long without liberty. Within the thematic context of the play, however, Roberts' comments seem to suggest that it's particularly frustration with authority, rather than frustration in general, that led the men to act in the way they did, meaning that the actions of the sailors support the play's thematic premise that authority must be resisted.

Act 2, Scene 2

Act 2, Scene 2 Summary

This scene is also set on the ship's upper deck. The men stand to attention as the Captain enters, followed by Roberts. At first, he goes to stand with the men, but the Captain orders him to stand with him, announcing that the ship is being ordered out of Elysium and that from now on the crew is going to work doubly hard to erase their bad behavior from the ship's record. He says he's ordered Roberts to make sure the crew works hard and obeys orders, calling him an honorable man who keeps his word no matter what. He then hints that if Roberts does a good job, there might be a promotion in it for him. As Roberts reacts with surprise, the Captain orders the ship to get underway. As the men disperse, he orders Roberts to take a small group of men to the back of the ship and make them work up a sweat. At first Roberts doesn't answer, but then when the Captain insists on being answered formally, Roberts does as he asks.

After the Captain exits the men ask why Roberts let the Captain speak to him that way. Dolan appears, saying Roberts is tired after taking the late watch the previous night. As Roberts is about to exit with his men, Dolan reveals he's had a communication asking all men with 2 years' experience to apply for a transfer to combat duty. He adds excitedly that Roberts is the only man with that amount of experience, that the Captain's authority is already weakened from his argument with the Admiral, and that all it will take to ruin him completely is Roberts' being transferred. He says he's already typed out the letter of request, but Roberts refuses to sign it. As Dolan insists, Roberts becomes angry and tries to exit, but he finds his way blocked by crew. He shouts for them to let him through, they do, he exits, and the remaining sailors complain about Roberts' change in attitude.

Over the loudspeaker, we hear radio commentary suggesting the war in Europe is ending. This serves as a transition into Scene 3.

Act 2, Scene 2 Analysis

The main purpose of this scene is to dramatize the shifts in relationship among Roberts, the Captain, and the crew. This is done through a series of deliberate actions by the Captain designed to distance Roberts from the men, creating tension so that Roberts will have less authority and less respect and therefore be less of a thorn in the Captain's side. These actions begin when the Captain calls Roberts to stand with him rather than with the men. They continue with the hint that Roberts might receive a promotion for following the Captain's orders, go further with the Captain's insistence that Roberts address him appropriately, and conclude with Roberts' refusal to sign the transfer letter. He does these last two because of the agreement he and the Captain made at the end of Act 1 that resulted in the sailors' receiving liberty, but the point to remember is that the sailors don't know that. All they can see is that Roberts' loyalties are shifting, that he's

acting from the same self-serving motivations as the Captain. There is clear irony here, in that Roberts' apparent ambition is a fabrication by the Captain--the audience knows it, Roberts knows it, the Captain knows it, but the crew doesn't. The tension created by this difference in awareness manifests itself in the last few lines of the scene in the complaints of the heretofore unconditionally devoted crew members and increases in the following scenes.

Meanwhile, Dolan's letter and the radio commentary increase the pressure on Roberts as his opportunity to achieve his goal of seeing combat duty is simultaneously closer and further away than ever. These two tensions, between Roberts and the crew and between Roberts and his goals, build throughout the remainder of the act until they climax in the confrontation between Roberts and the Captain in Act 2, Scene 4.

Act 2, Scene 3

Act 2, Scene 3 Summary

Doc and Pulver listen to the radio commentary, agreeing that the idea of Roberts' deliberately pursuing promotion is unlikely. Their conversation reveals it's been 2 weeks since the previous scene, that Roberts spends all his time in the radio shack listening to the war news, and that several of the sailors believe he really is trying for promotion. As they talk about how Roberts isn't communicating openly with either of them, Dowdy and two other sailors enter, saying Roberts has put Dolan on report and asking Doc to talk to him. They explain that several of the men are complaining angrily about Roberts, who, until then, had never seemed to be the type to put someone on report. They also explain that Roberts became angry because Dolan was pushing him to sign the letter of application for a transfer.

Roberts enters. Dowdy and the other sailors quickly leave. Roberts suggests that Pulver get a cup of coffee. Pulver suggests they go together, but Roberts indicates he wants to talk to Doc. Pulver exits, saying he's going up to the radio shack to listen to the war news. After he's gone, Roberts pleads with Doc to authorize a medical transfer for him, saying he's got to get off the ship. Doc asks for the truth about what happened with Dolan. At first Roberts says Dolan was insubordinate and rude, but then reveals the real reason--that he'd just heard the war news, was jealous and upset, sick of the men, and angry that they're thinking he's trying for promotion. He says he wouldn't "walk 10 feet across the room to get anything from that Captain." Doc suggests that Roberts seems to think the crew owes him something, and Roberts realizes that's exactly what's going on, saying he's blaming them instead of himself for ... but then he stops himself. Doc asks whether he's made an agreement with the Captain. Roberts says he hasn't and then asks again for a medical transfer. Doc says he'd never get away with it.

Pulver rushes in and excitedly turns up the radio in time to hear an announcement that the war is over in Europe. As the announcer continues, Doc sees Roberts is upset and turns off the radio, saying there's still fighting in the Pacific. Roberts says he'll be out of that fight as well, but then he says his feelings don't matter, that the important thing is that the war in Europe is over. They talk about celebrating with drinks of medical alcohol and orange juice, but then Pulver remembers a project he's been working on, saying Roberts' earlier comments about never finishing anything inspired him to actually complete it. He pulls out his self-made firecracker, explaining that he constructed it to put under the Captain's bunk. They ask whether he's sure it works, and he goes out to test it. Roberts and Doc talk about what a great idea the firecracker is, and they are in the middle of toasting Pulver's inventiveness when suddenly there's an explosion from another part of the ship. The Captain is heard issuing orders as Roberts and Doc make plans to go and rescue Pulver. Just as they're about to exit, however, Pulver appears, singed and covered in soapsuds, explaining as Doc checks him out that he set the firecracker off in the laundry room. Roberts hears the Captain and tells Pulver to be

quiet. Pulver, Roberts, and Doc listen as a sailor explains to the Captain what happened, and the Captain issues orders that the men need to be more careful.

After they've moved away, Roberts starts to leave, saying to Pulver that they need to create another firecracker in a hurry. Pulver says he used up all his materials making the one that just exploded, and there's no chance there will be another one. Disappointed, Roberts goes out on deck. Pulver comments to Doc on how, for a while, Roberts seemed happy. Doc says he may have been happy, but he's also panicked about the possibility of not being able to get into combat. As he turns up the radio, Pulver comments on how he feels he let Roberts down.

Act 2, Scene 3 Analysis

The first important element of this scene is the information that tensions between Roberts and the crew are increasing. We learn this through Doc and Pulver's comments about Roberts' behavior, through the story of what happened to Dolan, and through Roberts' desperate request for a medical transfer. The contrast to the easy-going, well-liked and eager-for-combat Roberts of the play's earlier scenes is clear, making Doc's suspicions that something is going on both believable and reasonable. By the end of the scene, when Roberts exits after hearing the news from the war, it becomes easy to understand that the tension within him is coming close to boiling over, something that actually takes place in the following scene.

The second important element of this scene is the re-emergence of the Pulver sub-plot. It has remained essentially undeveloped through the middle section of the play, but now it returns and takes a significant amount of focus. The firecracker becomes an important symbol here of Pulver's desire to earn Roberts' respect, with the fact that he completes it representing his eagerness to change. Conversely, his comments at the end of the scene represent not so much his failure with the firecracker as his failure to win Roberts' approval for actually completing something. Finally, the fact that Pulver enters covered in soapsuds is a symbol of his ongoing transformation, representing the way he's been "cleansed" of his old habits and beliefs and is evolving into a new man.

Act 2, Scene 4

Act 2, Scene 4 Summary

On the upper deck a few minutes later, Dolan and several other sailors are listening to radio coverage of a public appearance by the English Royal Family in celebration of the war's ending in Europe. They also talk about the good times they had on Elysium. Roberts enters, one of the sailors yells "Flash Red," and the men greet him formally. Roberts apologizes to Dolan, but he responds with additional formality and quickly goes to bed, followed quickly by the other sailors.

Alone on deck, Roberts listens as an announcer on the radio speaks about how the war has been won by the fighting men but that it's up to each individual to recognize the enemies, "ambition, cruelty, arrogance, and stupidity." At the end of his speech, "The Stars and Stripes Forever" plays. Roberts stands, goes to the Captain's palm tree, salutes it, pulls it out of its pot, and throws it over the side. He then goes out. A moment later, the Captain appears in his bathrobe and carrying a watering can. When he discovers the empty pot, he races back to his cabin, sounds a general alarm, and shouts over the loudspeaker that all the men are to report to their battle stations.

The sailors appear from below decks, scattered and confused as they try to find their guns, their posts, and their clothes. Meanwhile, the Captain shouts over the loudspeaker that the men will stay at battle stations until he finds out who got rid of the palm tree, saying its destruction is an insult to the ship. As he reads through the list of personnel, looking for a hint as to who did it, the sailors celebrate the fact that the container is empty. When he reaches Pulver's name, the Captain comments that he doesn't have the guts, but then realizes the tree must have been destroyed by Roberts. Over the loudspeaker Roberts is ordered to report to the Captain's cabin. As the sailors watch, Roberts enters, crosses the deck, and joins the Captain. Their conversation is heard over the loudspeaker as the Captain accuses Roberts of destroying the palm tree, and Roberts denies it. The Captain blurts out that he's kept his part of the bargain and given the men liberty, accusing Roberts of breaking his word. Roberts says he hasn't sent in any more letters, and the men on deck, who are still listening, realize the truth of what's been going on.

The Captain becomes so upset he can't speak, and over the loudspeaker it sounds like he's vomiting. A sailor calls for Doc to report to the Captain's cabin on the double. A moment later Doc enters, walking slowly and smoking. As he exits into the cabin a sailor looks into its porthole, saying the Captain has his head in a garbage can and is vomiting profusely. A moment later, as Roberts and Doc come out, Roberts orders the men to step down from battle stations. As the men pass him on the way back to their bunks they all say goodnight, something that seems to come as a puzzling surprise, particularly when Dolan does it. Roberts says good night, watching Dolan leave.

Act 2, Scene 4 Analysis

This scene contains several climaxes, or high points of thematic and dramatic action. The first is the use of the term "Flash Red" when Roberts appears. As previously discussed, the term has been used previously in the play as a warning of the Captain's approach. Its use at this point is the climax of the resentment felt by the soldiers towards Roberts, the point at which both Roberts and the men feel most alienated from each other.

This climax triggers the scene's second climax, the destruction of the palm tree. Again, as the Captain himself says in his outraged speech over the loudspeaker, the tree is an important symbol. While the Captain sees it as a symbol of success, the audience, Roberts, and the sailors all see it as a symbol of empty authority and selfish ambition. We are reminded of this symbolism in the speech over the radio referring to "ambition, cruelty, arrogance, and stupidity," all the things embodied by the Captain and his precious tree, all the things that Roberts has been fighting throughout the play, and all the things he desperately wants to go into combat to continue to fight. His destruction of the tree, therefore, symbolizes his renewed determination to live life on his own terms as a rebel with integrity, dignity, compassion, and respect for his fellow human beings. Meanwhile, the fact that the patriotic "Stars and Stripes Forever" reinforces the idea that Roberts is an embodiment of American values and that his destruction of the palm tree is a further dramatization of the relative importance of those values.

The scene's third climax is the confrontation between Roberts and the Captain, in which the truth of what's been bothering Roberts and of why his behavior has changed is revealed. Something to remember here is that Roberts enters the Captain's cabin knowing that the loudspeaker is on, which means that everything he says is calculated so as to reveal the truth. This circumstance simultaneously increases the crew's resentment of the Captain, reignites their respect for Roberts, and inspires the crew to an action we hear about in the following scene. It also means that their mumbled goodnights to him function on two levels: as an acknowledgment of their renewed respect and as a foreshadowing of what they're about to do.

The way the Captain is referred to as vomiting into the garbage can follows through on the foreshadowing in Act 1 Scene 2, when Dolan refers to how the Captain gets sick every time he gets angry at Roberts. Also, the passing reference to the Captain's belief that Pulver doesn't have the guts to destroy the tree becomes an ironic foreshadowing of the man that Pulver becomes at the end of the play, in which we clearly see that because of Roberts, he has finally developed the guts.

Act 2, Scene 5

Act 2, Scene 5 Summary

Over the loudspeaker, three announcements are heard, one of which is an order for Dolan to report to the radio shack. Lights come up on Roberts and Pulver's stateroom, where Pulver is lying on his bunk, Doc sits with a drink, and Roberts is closing up his suitcase. When he's finished, Wiley takes it out, saying he'll take it down to where the boat from the island is going to pick him up. After he exits, Roberts and Doc talk about Roberts' travel plans, and their conversation reveals he's been transferred to a base in Hawaii. As Pulver warns him to be careful, Roberts talks excitedly about how he's been posted to a destroyer. Dolan comes in with copies of the radio dispatch officially detaching him from the ship. Roberts seems curious about how his orders happened, saying he hasn't sent in a transfer request in a month. Dolan answers evasively and Roberts seems about to ask more questions, but Dolan tells him he needs to hurry. As they talk about the Captain's response to the reassignment, Dolan reveals he's too busy setting up two new palm trees and establishing a 24-hour guard over them to really care. He then tells Pulver the Captain wants to see him, and exits with Pulver following.

Doc asks Roberts what he thinks of the crew. Roberts says he figures the crew likes him well enough and will continue to until "the next guy comes along," saying they're too busy to really care about someone other than themselves. Doc then tells him that because the crew knew Roberts had agreed to write no more transfer letters, they wrote, signed and sent the letter themselves, telling how they had a competition to see who could forge the Captain's signature and revealing that he knows all about it because he was one of the judges. Roberts says he cares for the men greatly, and wonders what he can say to them now that he knows what they did. Doc tells him to say nothing, saying he wasn't supposed to know until after he was on the other ship.

Pulver enters, announcing that he's taken over Roberts' job and that he's having dinner with the Captain. He's soon followed by several other sailors, who pour out alcohol from a fire extinguisher and drink a toast to Roberts. They also present him with a homemade medal in the shape of a palm tree. Roberts starts to read the inscription but becomes unable to finish and hands it over to Doc, who reads that the medal is presented "for action against the enemy." Roberts says he doesn't deserve it, and Dowdy makes a joke about how they know he doesn't but they'll give it to him anyway.

Wiley appears and tells Roberts his boat has arrived. Roberts and the sailors drink their toasts. Roberts tells Pulver he's counting on him, pins on his medal, salutes, and exits.

Act 2, Scene 5 Analysis

This is the first of two scenes that explore the play's denouement, or falling action, in the aftermath of Roberts' climactic confrontation with the Captain. The key element of this

scene is the thematically relevant point that integrity, individuality, and honesty are worthy ideals by showing how Roberts is rewarded for exhibiting those very traits, a reward that comes in two forms. The first is his assignment to the warship, which we know is the fulfillment of his dreams. The second comes through the displays of loyalty and support from the crew: their writing of the letter and the medal they present to him. Roberts is very moved by these expressions of loyalty, as indicated by the fact he can't finish reading the inscription on the medal, and it's not because the engraving is bad.

The engraving itself reinforces the point made in the announcement over the loudspeaker that triggered Roberts' destruction of the palm tree, that the real enemies are selfishness and ambition. The fact that the Captain has now got himself two palm trees suggests that in contrast to Roberts, his ambitions are more firmly in place than ever.

Another element of interest is the announcement that Pulver is to take over Roberts' position as cargo officer. This is another stage in Pulver's journey of transformation, giving him the opportunity to put into further practice both what he's observed in Roberts' behavior throughout the play and what he's discovered about himself, that he can, in fact, bring projects to completion. The fact that Roberts tells Pulver he's counting on him is a step further in this journey, indicating that Roberts has developed at least a degree of faith in Pulver and his capabilities and perhaps even providing Pulver with a reason to have faith in himself.

Act 2, Scene 6

Act 2, Scene 6 Summary

Over the loudspeaker we hear a series of three announcements, one of which is a call for crew to pick up their mail. Lights come up on the amidships area, revealing Doc reading a letter and a sailor guarding the Captain's palm trees. Pulver enters carrying a bundle of mail. Dowdy enters from another direction, telling Pulver he and the other men have finished with the job Pulver gave them and that Pulver was right in issuing the orders he did. He also reveals that the Captain isn't showing a movie again, saying he's punishing the whole crew because one sailor removed his shirt. He urges Pulver to do something, but Pulver says he'll take care of the situation in his own way.

As Dowdy exits, Pulver looks through his mail, discovering he's got a letter from Roberts dated 3 weeks ago. He reads the letter aloud, and we learn that Roberts has connected with a friend of Pulver's named Fornell, that he's excited to actually be fighting in the war, though he misses the men from the cargo ship. He also talks about discovering the real enemy of success in the war, boredom, which eventually leads to apathy which he describes as a kind of suicide. He also talks about his medal, saying it's the possession he's most proud of.

As Doc looks at Roberts' letter, Pulver notices he's got a letter from Furnell. He reads it, and Doc immediately senses something is wrong. Dowdy enters just as Pulver announces Roberts is dead, killed in an attack by a Japanese suicide pilot. The letter goes on to say that Roberts and another officer were drinking coffee when the attack hit. Dowdy asks whether he can show the crew that letter, but Doc tells him to show them the first letter. Dowdy takes it and exits. Pulver paces, and then tells the sailor guarding the trees he'll cover for him while he gets his mail. After the sailor is gone Pulver yanks the palm trees out of their pots and throws them over the side. As Doc watches, he knocks on the Captain's door, says he threw the palm trees overboard, and asks why there's going to be no movie that night.

Act 2, Scene 6 Analysis

In this second scene of denouement, we see how Roberts has achieved both of his goals: to fight in combat and to teach Pulver some responsibility. The fact that Roberts dies while drinking coffee might perhaps be seen as ironic, and possibly even tragic, given that he's a character we've grown to respect and care for over the course of the play. It has to be remembered, however, that whether he died drinking coffee or whether he died on deck, he was still doing what he'd wanted, needed, and struggled to do. He also left the cargo ship with his integrity and ideals intact. He lived and died with purpose, meaning that his death makes the thematic point that the emotional circumstances of death are much more personally relevant than the physical ones. The ultimate irony, of course, is that Roberts dies in an attack by a Japanese suicide pilot, or

"kamikaze." The ironic implication of this is that the pilot was, in his own way, fighting from his own sense of purpose, identity, and integrity. It's possible that at this point, the play could be interpreted as a warning that no sense of integrity or mission serves as protection from someone who shares similar intensities of feeling but radically opposite attitudes, but ultimately the purpose and themes of this play are dependent upon the content of its final moments, and for those we turn to Pulver.

As the scene begins, Pulver's journey of transformation is almost complete as indicated by the way Dowdy refers to his good judgment. The transformation isn't yet total. Pulver doesn't seem to be prepared to act on the movie situation immediately, but becomes total when Pulver, as a result of hearing about Roberts' death, accepts the same kind of responsibility for the well-being of the men and for fighting the enemy in the way Roberts did. Once again, Roberts' life and attitudes are dramatized as ideal, worthy ways of living and relating to the world, and we have little doubt that in his own way and his own time, Mister Pulver will grow into having as much integrity as *Mister Roberts*.

Characters

The Captain

The captain is a petty tyrant who earns the enmity of all the crewmen. He is an absurd, ridiculous figure. He insists on imposing strict regulations, such as when he gives the order that the men may not remove their shirts, even though the weather is extremely hot. He cancels the nightly movie for any small breach in regulations. The captain also suffers from class envy, hating Roberts because Roberts has a college education. The captain's smallness of mind is revealed by the fact that he cherishes the award he received, on behalf of the ship, for superior achievement in delivering supplies. The award was a potted palm tree, which he waters tenderly and displays with pride. The captain wants to build on this insignificant success and aspires to become a commander, which is why he needs Roberts to stay on the ship, since Roberts is highly competent and the captain is not.

Doc

Doc is the ship's doctor. He is between thirty-five and forty years old and possesses a wry sense of humor. Roberts confides in him frequently and the two men sometimes argue. Doc debunks Roberts's idea of heroism, saying that physical heroism is merely a reflex that occurs in a dangerous situation. He tries to persuade Roberts that he is doing as much good on the *AK-601* as he would if he were in a combat zone. Doc participates in the captain's name-signing contest, and he judges it as well. He also takes it upon himself to inform Roberts of the contest after it has taken place.

Dolan

Dolan is a young, garrulous, brash yeoman, who enjoys the fact that he is responsible for typing Roberts's letters requesting a transfer. He also is well informed about Navy regulations. During the liberty on Elysium, he gets drunk and brings a goat back with him as a mascot, which happens to be the property of an admiral.

Dowdy

Dowdy is a hard-bitten man between thirty-five and forty years old. He has some authority over the men and hands out their tasks. It is Dowdy's idea to award Roberts the brass palm tree.

Gerhard

Gerhard is one of the quieter crewmen. He is part of a deputation that appeals to Doc and Pulver to persuade Roberts to take Dolan off report. He explains how the men have turned against Roberts.

Lieutenant Ann Girard

Lieutenant Ann Girard is an attractive, blond nurse who is invited on the ship by Pulver, who plans to seduce her. When she discovers that the men have been spying on the nurses in the shower, she promptly leaves the ship.

Insigna

Insigna is one of the crewmen. He is not noted for his intelligence, but it is he who discovers that the nurses can be spied upon with binoculars. Insigna does not get along with Mannion and starts a fight with him after quarreling over spying on the women. But by the time the two men return from Elysium Island, where they have taken part in the fight at the Army dance, they have become the best of friends.

Chief Johnson

Chief Johnson is the ship's chief petty officer. He is a big man of about forty years old.

Lindstrom

Lindstrom is one of the crewmen. He tries to stop the fight between Mannion and Insigna, and he supplies the ribbon for the award that the men present to Roberts.

Mannion

Mannion is a crewman who watches the women in the shower, while pretending to the others that no one is in the shower. He and Insigna are enemies but later become good friends. Mannion is the man appointed to present the award to Roberts; he made the medal himself in the machine shop.

Ensign Frank Pulver

Ensign Frank Pulver is an immature officer who likes to spend a lot of his time sleeping. He is timid but boasts of his sexual conquests, although Doc and Roberts do not believe him. He is scared of the captain and never puts into practice any of the pranks he conspires against him, such as leaving marbles in the captain's overhead so they will

roll around and keep him awake at night, or putting a firecracker under the captain's bunk. Roberts teases him about the fact that he never finishes anything he starts out to do. After Roberts leaves the ship, Pulver is promoted to Roberts's position of cargo officer. After he hears of Robert's death, he finds the courage to stand up to the captain on behalf of the men.

Lieutenant Doug Roberts

Lieutenant Doug Roberts is the cargo officer, a position he has held for nearly two and a half years. Roberts has a college education and quit medical school in order to join the Navy. He is frustrated by the fact that he is on a cargo ship rather than in a combat role. He feels he has to prove himself by engaging in battle, and to that end he writes many letters to the authorities requesting a transfer. The captain refuses every request. He hates Roberts but cannot afford to lose him, since Roberts is a very competent officer.

Roberts is highly respected by the men. They love that he protects them from the captain's pettiness and that he exercises his authority wisely. He never tries to bully the men, and he understands their boredom and frustration. Although at one point the men misunderstand him and think that he is getting tough with them because he wants a promotion, the misunderstanding is cleared up when Roberts tosses the captain's palm tree overboard. The men then show their loyalty and respect for Roberts by forging the captain's signature on a letter securing Roberts the transfer he wants. Before Roberts leaves, the men show their affection for him by giving him an award which they call the Order of the Palm.

Roberts is killed in a Japanese suicide bombing raid, but not before he has written a letter showing his great affection for the men of the *AK-601*.

Stefanowski

Stefanowski is one of the crewmen who spies on the nurses in the shower. He joins in the fight in the first scene, on Insigna's side, and then fights with Wiley. Like the others, he is bored on the ship and wonders whether a man could get sent back to the States if he cuts off a finger. Stefanowski is the man who thinks up the words for the award the men give to Roberts.

Wiley

Wiley is one of the crewmen. He joins in the fight on Mannion's side and then fights Stefanowski. During shore leave, he has a riotous time on Elysium.

Themes

Comradeship, Respect, and Loyalty

At the beginning of the play, there is some disharmony amongst the crewmen, as shown by the fight that breaks out between Mannion and Insigna, which also involves Wiley and Stefanowski. This scene suggests the corrosive effects of boredom and the denial of offshore leave. After the men return from Elysium, they have bonded as a group, and Insigna and Mannion are the best of friends. The change is so noticeable that Roberts remarks on it, saying that before, all he had was 167 separate men. Now he has a real crew.

The respect the men feel for Roberts is also a key thematic element. They like him because they feel he is their ally against the captain and he treats them fairly. He does not behave as if he is superior just because he is an officer. They only lose respect for him when they mistakenly think he is trying to curry favor with the captain in the hope of attaining a promotion. Respect is restored when Roberts shows his independence and tosses overboard the palm tree, a symbol of the captain's authority.

After this incident, there are no limits to the loyalty the men show to Roberts, or the ingenuity with which they express it. They take great risks in taking it upon themselves to send out a letter approving Roberts's transfer. They are even prepared to forge the captain's signature. They also display creativity and team spirit when they work together to create a going-away gift for Roberts. Roberts is touched by their warmth and generosity, and feels as loyal towards them as they do towards him, although he is unable to find the words to express his feelings for them until he writes to them from afar.

In contrast, the captain, who has a petty bureaucratic mind and delights in exerting a tyranny over the men, fails utterly to win the men's respect or loyalty. Respect is accorded only when it is deserved.

Attaining Manhood

Roberts is presented as a mature man who is worthy of respect. In contrast, Ensign Pulver is immature. Pulver boasts about his imaginary female conquests, and although he pretends he wants to improve his mind, he rarely finishes reading any book he starts, nor does he ever follow through on the many pranks he plans against the captain. In fact, he is terrified of the captain, as Roberts well knows.

Roberts always encourages Pulver to show some mettle. In act 1, scene 2, Roberts tells Pulver that when he actually finishes one of his plans against the captain, "that's the day I'll have some respect for you□that's the day I'll look up to you as a man." At the end of act 2, scene 3, it seems for a moment as if Pulver's moment has come, since he shows he can make a firecracker work, and Roberts wants to help him make another one to

put under the captain's bunk. But it turns out that Pulver has used up all his materials and cannot make another firecracker. He feels this failure keenly. It was his chance to become a man in Roberts's eyes, and although Roberts says he is proud of him, Pulver still feels upset because he thinks he let Roberts down.

This theme of attaining maturity as a man is alluded to again at the end of act 2, scene 5, as Roberts is about to leave the ship, having gained his transfer. He turns to Pulver and says, "Remember, I'm counting on you." Pulver nods. He knows exactly to what Roberts is referring.

After Roberts leaves, Pulver is promoted to cargo officer. Unlike Roberts, he allows himself to be dominated by the captain. When the captain cancels a movie in the evening, Pulver does not complain with sufficient vigor. Dowdy tells him he has to keep needling the captain. Pulver is reminded of this again when he reads Roberts's letter to the crew, in which Roberts alludes to Pulver's need to be more assertive. He writes, "So, Doc, and especially you, Frank, don't let those guys down. Of course, I know that by this time they must be very happy because the captain's overhead is filled with marbles."

It is only when Pulver learns of Roberts's death that he summons his courage to confront the captain. First he imitates Roberts's act of tossing the palm trees overboard, and then he bursts in on the captain, admits what he has done (just as Roberts had challenged him to do earlier), and demands to know why there will be no movie that night. It is clear that he is now ready to assume Roberts's role as defender of the crewmen.

Style

Symbolism as a technique involves using an object, event, or person to represent an alternate meaning. For example, the small palm tree that sits in a five-gallon can outside the captain's cabin symbolizes the smallness of the tasks in which the ship is engaged. Roberts explains that the palm tree was awarded to the ship for "delivering more toothpaste and toilet paper than any other Navy cargo ship in the safe area of the Pacific." It is not the sort of award that men fight to win during a war. To the men, it is a reminder of their own boredom and sense of frustration and futility. The fact that the captain reveres his little trophy gives it an added significance: it represents the captain's vanity, his obsession with insignificant things, and his ambition, since he wants to use his ship's success as a stepping stone to attain the rank of commander.

The playwright ensures that as the symbol of the captain's misplaced sense of self-importance, the palm tree is subject to some disrespectful treatment. During one comic moment, the goat the men have brought back with them from Elysium chews on the tree. Another moment, the captain puts a twenty-four-hour armed guard on the palm trees (he replaced the one tree Roberts tossed overboard with two new trees) and issues shoot-to-kill orders to protect the trees. The comedy arises from the disproportion between the nature of the object and the captain's reverence of it.

In a neat twist, however, the men manage to turn the palm tree into a positive symbol. They call the brass medal they give Roberts the "order of the palm," because it is shaped like a palm tree. The brass palm tree signifies respect, affection, and real service, as opposed to the real palm tree which signifies only a petty man's delight in distinctions of no importance.

Historical Context

Mister Roberts begins a few weeks before V-E Day, which would place it some time during April 1945, when World War II was drawing to a close. Throughout the early months of 1945, Germany's position became more and more hopeless, as the invading Allied armies penetrated deeper into the country. In March, Allied armies advancing from the west reached the German city of Cologne, and in April, the Rhineland and the Ruhr were captured by the Allies. Meanwhile, the Russians were advancing from the east, and on April 23, 1945, they reached the northern and eastern suburbs of Berlin. German leader Adolf Hitler committed suicide on April 30, 1945. On May 2, Berlin was captured, and on May 7, Germany surrendered unconditionally (as the crew of the *AK-601* hear over the radio in *Mister Roberts*). In Britain, the royal family, as well as Prime Minister Winston Churchill assembled at the balcony of Buckingham Palace and greeted the huge crowds that had gathered in the streets to celebrate the end of war (this is the celebration the *AK-601* crewmen hear described over the radio).

After V-E Day, the war in the Pacific against Japan still had to be won, but it had been apparent since the spring of 1945 that Japan could not resist for much longer. The USS *Virgo*, the model for the *AK-601* in *Mister Roberts*, played a role in the Pacific war, carrying U.S. Marine Corps equipment and becoming a unit of the Fifth Amphibious Force that was preparing for the invasion of the Gilbert Islands. American forces under General MacArthur captured the Gilbert Islands in November 1943, and the Marshall and Admiralty Islands fell in early 1944.

The Philippines were re-taken in stages, with American troops entering Manila, the Philippine capital, in February 1945. U.S. forces also advanced relentlessly in the Pacific, capturing Iwo Jima in March. The *Virgo*, with Lieutenant Heggen aboard, was stationed off Iwo Jima at this time, replenishing destroyers.

In mid-June, American forces captured the island of Okinawa, in the Ryukyu Islands. The *Virgo*, with Heggen still aboard, anchored in Okinawa for fifteen days and went to general quarters (a condition of readiness when naval actions are imminent) thirty-two times for air-raid alerts. It is at some point during the battle for Okinawa that Roberts, in the play, is killed by a Japanese suicide bomber.

By the time Okinawa was captured, American forces had complete dominance in the air, and Japan's factories and industries were steadily being destroyed by heavy bombing raids. At the Potsdam Conference in July 1945, Great Britain, Russia, and the United States called upon Japan to surrender or to face devastation of its homeland. On August 6, the United States dropped an atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima, killing thousands of people. Exact estimates of the death toll vary, but the city of Hiroshima in the 2000s puts the number of dead by December 1945 at about 140,000. (Thousands died of injuries and illness caused by radiation in the months that followed the dropping of the bomb.) Immediately after the blast, four square miles of the city were reduced to rubble. Two days later, Russia declared war on Japan. The United States dropped a second atomic bomb, this time on the Japanese city of Nagasaki, on

August 9. The day after this bombing, the Japanese asked for peace, and on August 14, Japan officially surrendered.

Critical Overview

Mister Roberts was greeted with praise by reviewers when it began its run on Broadway on February 18, 1948, at the Alvin Theatre. A typical reviewer comment appears in Irwin Shaw's assessment of the play in *New Republic*: "one of the funniest plays ever seen on the American stage." John Lardner, writing in the *New Yorker*, declares the play is "almost as good as it could possibly be." It remains true to the "sardonic tone" of the novel from which it is adapted, says Lardner, as well as to its main point:

That a backwash war, funny and tragic as hell, was fought parallel with the shooting war; that the distance between the parallels could be five thousand miles in spirit as well as in space; and that the one kind of war damaged men who were caught in it as much as the other.

Lardner finds Roberts to be "a sweet and shadowy figure," less satisfying a character than those characters around him, although ably portrayed by Henry Fonda. Lardner argues that the only flaw in the play is that□unlike the story line in the episodic, plotless novel□the playwrights felt obliged to "invent a situation to tie up loose ends," and so came up with the plot centering around Roberts's deal with the captain and his subsequent misunderstanding with the men.

John Mason Brown in the *Saturday Review* offers the opposing view that *Mister Roberts* is improved by its adaptation from novel into play. Although some of the characters in the novel were eliminated in the stage version, Brown thinks what was offered in their place more than makes up for the loss, while the play still retains the appealing simplicity of the novel. Brown admires the earthiness of the language and the skilful handling of "the affection that men feel for men," an emotion often largely unexpressed. He singles out for particular praise the scene in which the men award Roberts the Order of the Palm. Brown also argues that although *Mister Roberts* might at times come close to slapstick, might lack importance, and is limited in emotional range by its fidelity to the young men it depicts, it is nonetheless highly effective in achieving what it sets out to do:

It is superlative theatre; a miracle of production in which the script, setting, acting, and direction all fuse to create one of the most uproarious, heartwarming, and yet touching evenings Broadway has yielded in many a long year.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #1

Aubrey holds a Ph.D. in English and has published many articles on twentieth-century literature. In this essay, Aubrey discusses the collaboration between Heggen and Joshua Logan as they adapted Mister Roberts *from novel into play.*

Mister Roberts began its fictional life as a novel, but after the success of the book, Heggen became aware that it had the potential to be turned into a successful play. The story of how *Mister Roberts* metamorphosed from novel into play is a fascinating one and is told in John Leggett's imaginative biography of Heggen and Ross Lockridge, *Ross and Tom: Two American Tragedies*, and in co-playwright Joshua Logan's memoir, *Josh: My Up and Down, In and Out Life*.

Not entirely confident of his own abilities to write the play he had in mind, Heggen at first turned to his friend, novelist Max Shulman, for assistance, and the two men agreed to collaborate. Shulman was aware that the novel was a series of largely unconnected episodes and that a play needed a real plot, with some dramatic tension. He thought this could be accomplished by creating a challenge to the Captain's authority that the men could use to blackmail him. So he invented an incident in which the Captain was discovered with a native girl in his quarters. Nothing even remotely like this occurred in the novel, and when they completed the first draft, Heggen was aware of what a poor effort it was. Shulman's agent agreed it was inadequate, as did producer Leland Hayward, who was interested in a dramatization of *Mister Roberts* and had asked to see the draft. Hayward complained that Shulman and Heggen had veered so far from the original book that the spirit of it had been lost. At Hayward's request, Heggen agreed to work on a new version, this time on his own. He sent the first act to Hayward, who thought it had promise but was, like the novel, a series of fragments, without any connecting links. He decided to put Heggen in touch with Logan, who was a highly successful director of many hit plays, including the famous *Annie Get Your Gun*.

Logan read Heggen's draft, and for the most part agreed with Hayward, but there was one scene which he felt Heggen had got exactly right: the scene in which the Captain has just refused to grant his men a liberty as they arrive at Elysium. In the novel, the Captain suddenly and inexplicably changes his mind and allows the liberty, and the entire incident lasts only for a paragraph. But in his draft for the play, Heggen had expanded this incident into what became the central moment of the play: the pact that the Captain strikes with Roberts, which happens because of Roberts's devotion to his men and his desire to secure them a liberty. The Captain will allow the liberty only if Roberts writes no more transfer requests. Logan saw that Heggen had created a dramatic scenario that would work on stage, and this enabled him to visualize the entire play. Logan then thought up the substance of the second act: how the crew would start to dislike Roberts because they thought he was angling for a promotion, and then they would by chance discover their mistake and in a burst of gratitude would hold a drunken contest to pick the best forgery of the captain's signature. (In the novel, Roberts simply receives an order to return to the United States for reassignment, without any

subterfuge on the part of the crew. No explanation is offered as to why the official order comes through, after so many requests have been refused.)

Logan had all this in mind before he met Heggen, and when the two did meet, he soon convinced Heggen that he was the man who could turn *Mister Roberts* into a successful play. For three months during the fall of 1947, they worked together, Heggen staying at the Connecticut home of Logan and his wife. They would start work at about five in the afternoon and work through the night until about six in the morning. According to Leggett, "Logan's strength was conceptual, seeing *Mister Roberts* in scene and narrative, while Tom's was in character and dialogue." Together they came up with a number of incidents not in the novel, including Roberts's bribery of the port director with whiskey taken from Pulver, which leads to the hilarious scene in which Roberts, Pulver, and Doc create fake Scotch out of Coca-Cola, iodine, and hair tonic. Logan also refined the crucial scene between the Captain and Roberts that Heggen had created in his original draft: Roberts agrees to show the Captain more respect in front of the men and to keep their meeting absolutely secret. Logan knew this would add more tension to the second act for both Roberts and the crew.

Another central point was the character of Roberts. Again, Logan was the instigator (at least according to his own account of their collaboration). He argued that Roberts should not be too perfect, that he had to possess a fatal flaw that could be cured at the end of the play. There was nothing like this in the novel, so it had to be created from scratch. Logan was following a rule of dramatic structure that one of his friends called Logan's Law, but which Logan had in fact learned from playwright Maxwell Anderson. Logan's Law stated that toward the end of any successful play, the protagonist must learn something about himself that changes his life for the better, as Logan relates in his autobiography *Josh*:

The audience must feel and see the leading man or woman become wiser, and the discovery must happen *onstage in front of their eyes. And that doesn't mean a happy ending*. If the hero is to die, then he just must make the discovery *before* he dies.

It is this change for the better that raises the moral stature of the protagonist and so allows the audience to grow too, along with the character.

Logan and Heggen decided that Roberts's flaw is his snobbery. He thinks that the men on a combat ship are superior to those on a cargo ship. So the play must emphasize and explain his desire to see combat, which is accomplished in the first two scenes. In the first scene, Roberts reports to Doc, in a passage that does not appear in the novel, that he saw a huge naval task force pass by the previous night. It is made very clear that he would give anything to be a part of that task force. Then in scene 2, Roberts confides to Doc his sense of inferiority about being on the *AK-601*: "We've got nothing to do with the war. Maybe that's why we're on this ship□because we're not good enough to fight." A moment later he says, "I've got to feel I'm *good* enough to be in this thing□to *participate*!" He sticks to his views even though Doc argues that physical heroism is overrated. Doc believes it is merely a reflex that three out of four men possess and would demonstrate if opportunity presented itself.

But at the end of the play, Roberts reveals in his letter to the men that he has discovered something he was not aware of before. Now that he is seeing real combat, he is full of admiration for the fighting men he is with, but he also realizes that the men who are involved in the more tedious tasks of war, "who sail from Tedium to Apathy and back again□with an occasional side trip to Monotony" have courage too. It takes courage and strength not to give into boredom, not to allow it to break the spirit. Roberts realizes that the men he sailed with on the ship they all called the "bucket" were every bit as brave as the men who have the opportunity to fill combat roles. It is not a matter of one set of men being better than the other. In this way, Roberts overcomes his snobbery. Logan called this letter Roberts's "self-realization letter," and it was greatly expanded from the letter Roberts wrote to the men in the novel, which is presented only briefly and in a non-dramatic way.

Logan also placed extra emphasis on the growth of Pulver from immature loafer to mature officer ready to defend his men. The novel ends with Pulver saying to the Captain, "I just threw your damn palm trees over the side." In the play this is altered only slightly, but it becomes the penultimate, not the final line. Logan added to it, "Now what's all this crap about no movie tonight?" which he hoped would show the audience that, as he put it, "Pulver had become Roberts, and therefore Roberts would live□and take care of us all." Logan's judgment proved accurate, because when *Mister Roberts* began its long run on Broadway, that line produced not only the biggest laugh but also a cheer from the audience. The message had come across.

Logan described the three months he worked on *Mister Roberts* with Heggen as the most exhilarating and hilarious time of his life, and Heggen also looked back on this period as the best of his life. However, their collaboration was not without its tensions. Heggen became uncomfortable with how much credit Logan□who co-wrote, directed, and co-produced the play□received for its success. Heggen also floundered when he tried to work on other projects. The creative energy that had produced the novel seemed to have dried up. At one point, Heggen believed he had become dependent on Logan's creativity, and he insisted that they collaborate on another play. Logan was happy to agree to this idea, but the troubled Heggen died, apparently by his own hand, before any real work could begin on it.

Source: Bryan Aubrey, Critical Essay on *Mister Roberts*, in *Drama for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2005.

Critical Essay #2

Petruso holds a bachelor's degree in history from the University of Michigan and a master's degree in screen writing from the University of Texas. In this essay, Petruso examines issues of leadership in the play.

In *Mister Roberts*, issues of leadership and what makes a good leader are at the center of the play. The play is set on a U.S. Navy ship that has seen no action and is in the Pacific theater during World War II. Boredom and lack of hope run rampant throughout the ranks. The captain of the ship provides little positive leadership, while his lieutenant, Doug Roberts, compensates with some success for his captain's inadequacies.

To be a leader in the situation presented in the play means to be in charge yet also to answer to and carry out orders from those above. A leader in this position should also have such qualities as compassion and understanding for the men he leads. The captain of the *AK 601* does not have these qualities. It is often said that "war is hell." This usually refers to the intensity of combat, but it can also refer to how boring inaction can be. The captain has isolated himself from his men and does not seem to care about their needs. He is more concerned with his potted palm than with the men who are serving on the ship.

The captain is really only worried about his own standing with his admiral and being promoted to full commander. He does not care much about how he gets this promotion, nor how shaky his current command really is. His potted palm is a metaphor for his leadership on the *AK 601* and what he perceives is a symbol of his competence as a leader. The captain has a sign on the plant that identifies it as his property and orders his sailors to "keep away," even though it is their work that helped him earn the award. In the description that sets the scene of the play in act 1, scene 1, Chief Johnson is described as spitting in the palm's pot after making sure he is not seen. From the first, it is clear that the men do not respect the captain and show their disrespect in subtle and not so subtle ways. When Roberts decides once and for all to stand up to the captain, he tosses the palm overboard. After the captain replaces it with two new palm trees, Roberts's replacement, Pulver, also tosses the palm trees overboard after learning Roberts has died.

One of the captain's biggest failings as a leader comes in the way he treats his crew. He denies them liberty (a shore leave) for over a year. The only men allowed off the ship are officers conducting official business. The captain fails to see how this confinement negatively affects the men's morale as well as their psyches. The men are literally cooped up like animals on the ship. The longer the men are not allowed any breaks, the more they act out. In act 1, scene 1, the crew goes a little crazy when, using a spyglass, they see female nurses on a nearby island. The captain has also canceled the men's nightly movies for such minor transgressions as a sailor not wearing his shirt while working on deck, a pet peeve of the captain.

While the captain, through bad leadership, causes his crew to suffer, Roberts suffers even more. Roberts wants to be off the ship and in combat. He left medical school to fight in the war but is stuck in endless inactivity. To that end, Roberts has put in a request for transfer on a weekly basis before the action of the play begins. The captain repeatedly refuses to give his approval to it, meaning Roberts will not get it. If the captain would have compassion, Roberts would most certainly be gone. Roberts goes to great lengths in *Mister Roberts* to obtain his transfer and nearly goes crazy in the process. The captain believes that Roberts's presence is essential to his own promotion because the admiral complimented Roberts's abilities as a cargo officer.

The captain regularly seeks out Roberts to remind him that he is beneath him and that he, as captain, is in charge. At the beginning of act 1, scene 3, the captain is angry with Roberts when he will not respond immediately to the captain's order to see him. Roberts is busy overseeing the transfer of a load to another ship. Roberts's latest letter requesting a transfer upsets the captain because Roberts claimed there was "disharmony aboard this ship." The captain goes on to humiliate Roberts in front of his men and puts them all on report.

Though Roberts has little hope for himself, he wants his men to have it. The crew does not respect the captain, but they respect Roberts, who is much more of a leader among them than the captain. While talking about another matter in act 1, scene 1, the ship's doctor, referring to Pulver, tells Roberts, "He [Pulver] thinks you are approximately God." This is so because Roberts continually puts himself out on the men's behalf. In addition, in act 1, Roberts maneuvers to secure the men a liberty. After the liberty is announced in act 1, scene 4, the captain takes it away in act 1, scene 5. In the next scene, Roberts agrees to sacrifice his campaign to get transferred from the ship and promises to be more yielding to the captain in front of the men in order to secure their long-awaited shore liberty. He also agrees to allow the captain some credit for the leave. This selfless act will make for a happier crew, as Roberts acknowledges. However, because of the sacrifice he had to make to get the liberty for the men, Roberts's hope for his own happiness is nearly gone. He fears he will be stuck on the ship for the duration of the war.

Throughout *Mister Roberts*, Roberts shows how generous and compassionate he is. At the beginning of act 1, scene 3, though the captain orders no fresh fruit to be given to other ships, Roberts gives some to the crew who have not seen such delicacies in months. Roberts gives the captain some credit for it. When the captain learns of Roberts's generosity, he gives Roberts ten days in his room as punishment. However, because Roberts is too valuable, the captain does not enforce this order. Roberts also allows the men to take off their shirts because of the heat despite the captain's standing order to the contrary. Roberts does not partake of the liberty and remains on the ship as the duty officer. When the men go a little wild on shore by drinking excessively, breaking into the home of the local French consul, crashing an American Army officer's dance, and stealing a goat, Roberts deals with the consequences of their actions. Roberts is the liaison with the shore patrolmen, who bring the drunken men back to the ship. Roberts assures the patrolmen that the crew will be penalized for their actions. Though

Roberts sacrifices for his men, he also has faults of his own, but not nearly as many as the captain.

While playwrights Heggen and Logan draw the captain with no redeeming qualities, they show Roberts's imperfections as well. Unlike the captain, Roberts knows he is flawed. It is this sense of humanity and awareness of self that helps make Roberts an effective leader. He knows that being stuck on the ship for months at a time is nearly intolerable. One way that Roberts demonstrates his own flaws is by sometimes putting his needs first. His obsession with being transferred to a different ship means leaving the crew at the mercy of the captain. Though Roberts works on getting the men a liberty at the end of act 1, scene 1, by going ashore himself to talk to someone, the trip also serves Roberts's own agenda. He is not trying to make the best of his situation in one sense: he is just trying to get out. Roberts sometimes takes his frustrations out on his men. When Dolan learns that the Navy needs experienced officers to transfer to ships, he types a letter for Roberts, not knowing about the private deal the captain and Roberts have made. Roberts will not sign it at the time and off stage puts Dolan on report for bothering him about it. Roberts later apologizes to Dolan and takes him off report, something the captain would never do.

Roberts finally gets his transfer because of his success as a leader among the ship's men. The crew risks their own freedom by faking a letter for Roberts asking for a transfer and forging their captain's approval. Just before Roberts leaves the ship, the crew makes him a crude medal shaped like a palm tree. His abilities as a leader pay off with his desired reward, though it also ends in his death as the ship he is transferred to is hit with a suicide-plane attack. This ending prompts the question of who really wins in the tug of war between the captain and Roberts, between the ineffective leader and the effective one. While the captain retains command of his ship, the crew feel no differently about him after Roberts is gone. He remains a very poor leader. Having served under Roberts changes the men. Roberts's leadership skills have ensured that his spirit lives on in them.

An undercurrent to the contrasting leadership skills of the captain and Roberts is social class. The captain is not educated. He worked in restaurants as a young man and came to the Navy after working in the merchant marine service. Roberts is educated, having spent time in medical school. The captain is threatened by Roberts's social standing, while the men are indifferent towards it; they only care about whomever will take charge and be fair about it. Repeatedly throughout the text of *Mister Roberts*, the captain expresses anger about those who have looked down upon him and takes this anger out on Roberts and, indirectly, the crew. The captain often throws out the fact that Roberts is college educated when the captain is talking down to him. For example, in act 1, scene 6, the captain says, "I hate your guts. . . . You think you're better than I am! You think you're better because you've had everything handed to you!" It is in this scene that the captain denies the men's liberty, but only gives it when he can make Roberts feel as bad he does. It might seem that Roberts is more developed as a character than the captain, but in fact it is that Roberts is more developed as a person and a leader than the captain will allow himself to be.

Source: A. Petruso, Critical Essay on *Mister Roberts*, in *Drama for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2005.

Adaptations

In 1955, *Mister Roberts* was made into a movie, directed by John Ford and starring Henry Fonda as Mister Roberts, Jack Lemmon as Ensign Pulver, and James Cagney as the captain.

A situation comedy version of *Mister Roberts* ran for one season on NBC during 1965 and 1966.

Topics for Further Study

Research how U.S. troops in the early 2000s cope with the boredom that can occur when they are inactive for long periods during deployment in a war zone.

Research the 1945 battle for Okinawa. How did the outnumbered U.S. forces manage to emerge victorious?

Write an essay about someone in your own life who serves as a "Mister Roberts" for you. What particular qualities does this person possess that win your admiration and respect? Why do you think the men in the play admire Roberts so much?

Watch the movie version of the play and discuss some of the differences in scenes and dialogue between the play and the movie.

Compare and Contrast

1940s: The United States and Japan are at war. When the war ends in 1945, Japan submits to American occupation. Some Japanese military leaders are convicted of war crimes and are hanged. Japan is given a new pacifist constitution that prevents it from going to war.

Today: Japan and the United States are close allies. In January 2004, Japan sends a small contingent of soldiers to Iraq to support the U.S.-led coalition, which marks the first time since World War II that Japan has sent troops abroad, except as part of United Nations peacekeeping operations. The Japanese troops provide humanitarian services and do not engage in combat. The Japanese government announces plans to revise Article Nine of its constitution, which bans the use of force to settle international disputes.

1940s: World events are conveyed by newspapers and radio. News still moves comparatively slowly.

Today: Communications are faster and more diverse than ever. The Internet and television provide up-to-the-minute news, with almost constant updates, in ways not possible a half century earlier. Battle scenes are often shown live on television and are instantly seen around the world.

1940s: American public opinion wholeheartedly supports World War II, which is considered a war of national survival against an evil enemy.

Today: Few subsequent American wars command such unanimous public support as World War II did. According to many opinion polls, the country is about evenly divided regarding the war in Iraq, in which a U.S.-led coalition ousted the dictator Saddam Hussein in 2003. The coalition occupies Iraq in mid-2004.

What Do I Read Next?

Delilah: A Novel about a U.S. Navy Destroyer and the Epic Struggles of Her Crew (1941), by Marcus Goodrich, is an engrossing novel of the sea. Goodrich served in the U.S. Navy during World War I, although the novel is set just before this time. The *Delilah* is an old destroyer that patrols the Sulu Sea in the Philippines during a time of racial and religious violence. The novel tells the story of how its crewmen deal with the difficult and demanding situations they face.

The Last Stand of the Tin Can Sailors: The Extraordinary World War II Story of the U.S. Navy's Finest Hour (2004), by James Hornfischer, is an exciting narrative of the battle in October 1944 off the Philippine island Samar, and the larger battle of Leyte, which began the American liberation of the Philippines. Hornfischer also supplies an account of the Japanese approach to the battle.

Okinawa: The Last Battle of World War II (reprint ed., 1996), by military historian Robert Leckie, covers the ferocious battle between American and Japanese forces for the island of Okinawa from April to June 1945, during which 13,000 Americans and 100,000 Japanese died.

From Here to Eternity (1951), by James Jones, is a novel about U.S. Army soldiers at a military base in the few months leading up to the December 1941 Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. This book tells a number of different individual stories and, like *Mister Roberts*, it shows that all too frequently in military life, bullying officers make life miserable for their men.

Further Study

Krutch, Joseph Wood, Review of *Mister Roberts*, in *Nation*, April 10, 1948, pp. 402—03.

In one of the less laudatory reviews of the play, Krutch affirms the value of *Mister Roberts* as popular entertainment but offers the view that it is adolescent and naïve.

Logan, Joshua, *Movie Stars, Real People, and Me*, Delacorte Press, 1978.

This book contains some lively anecdotes about Logan's experiences directing *Mister Roberts* and also contributing to the movie version.

Phelan, Kappo, Review of *Mister Roberts*, in *Commonweal*, March 5, 1948, p. 521.

A short, enthusiastic review of the play, which Phelan regards as hilarious, moving, and sad. Phelan questions whether it should be rated as highly as some reviewers have done.

Smith, David P., "Introduction," in *Mister Roberts*, Naval Institute Press, 1992.

This introduction to the novel contains information about Heggen's life, work, and tragic early death.

Bibliography

Brown, John Mason, Review of *Mister Roberts*, in *Saturday Review*, March 6, 1948, pp. 24—26.

Heggen, Thomas, *Mister Roberts*, Houghton Mifflin, 1946.

Heggen, Thomas, and Joshua Logan, *Mister Roberts*, Acting Edition, Dramatists Play Service, 1948.

Lardner, John, Review of *Mister Roberts*, in *New Yorker*, February 28, 1948, pp. 46—48.

Leggett, John, *Ross and Tom: Two American Tragedies*, Simon and Schuster, 1974.

Logan, Joshua, *Josh: My Up and Down, In and Out Life*, Delacorte Press, 1976, pp. 240—70.

Shaw, Irwin, Review of *Mister Roberts*, in *New Republic*, March 8, 1948, pp. 29—30.

BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

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

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

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

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

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

Selection Criteria

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

How Each Entry Is Organized

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

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

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

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

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

Other Features

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

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

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

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

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

Citing Drama for Students

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We Welcome Your Suggestions

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

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