The Petrified Forest Study Guide

The Petrified Forest by Robert E. Sherwood

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Introduction

The Petrified Forest, first performed in 1935, is one of the frequently performed plays of Robert E. Sherwood, one of America's best-known playwrights, winning the Pulitzer Prize for drama in 1936, 1939, and 1941. One of the reasons the play is so well known is that the 1941 movie adaptation is considered a classic of the gangster genre. Like the Broadway production, the movie starred Leslie Howard and Humphrey Bogart. The role of Duke Mantee, a bitter and complex sociopath, made Bogart a movie star, and his performance helped define how Hollywood was to portray gangsters ever after.

The story concerns three characters who move between love and despair: Alan Squier, a penniless intellectual who has come to the desert to die; Gabby, the cafe waitress who believes that her life would be rich with meaning if she could leave the cultural wasteland of America and go to France to study art; and Mantee, a desperate criminal who stalls his escape to reunite with a woman he never talks about. Sherwood uses them, along with the other characters who are held hostage by the gangsters at a small diner on the edge of the desert, to explore the American myths of the sensitive artist and the gangster, finding that they are not as different as they might at first seem.

Because of its blend of lively dialog, colorful characters, and psychological understanding, *The Petrified Forest* has remained a perennial favorite and has continuously been revived since it was first written. It is often included in anthologies of American drama and is available from Dramatists Play Service of New York.

Author Biography

Robert Emmet Sherwood was one of the most well recognized and prolific writers of the mid-twentieth century, winning awards in several major fields. He was born in 1896 in New Rochelle, New York, and educated at Milton Academy in Massachusetts and then at Harvard. In 1917, he left Harvard to join the Canadian Black Watch and fight in World War I. He was gassed twice and injured in both of his legs. Like many writers who found their worldview changed by participating in World War I, Sherwood came home disillusioned and virulently opposed to war. He earned his bachelor of arts degree from Harvard in 1918. After college, he worked for several important magazines, as a drama critic for *Vanity Fair,* as editor-in chief for *Life,* and as a literary editor for *Scribner's.*

Sherwood's first venture into writing for the movies came in 1925, when he was hired to rewrite the title cards for the silent film version of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame.* His first professionally produced play, *The Road to Rome*, was a success on Broadway in 1927, allowing him to quit his magazine work and support himself with writing. There followed a series of plays, nearly one every year, that focused on the futility of war and stressed Sherwood's faith in individual moral action. These plays were critical and financial successes. The best-known of the plays from this period is *The Petrified Forest*, which was produced in 1935.

Following *The Petrified Forest* came a stretch of plays that established Sherwood as one of the most important dramatists of his time. He won the Pulitzer Prize for *Idiot's Delight* in 1936, another Pulitzer for *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* in 1939, and yet another Pulitzer for *There Shall Be No Night* in 1941. During this period, World War II began in Europe, with America holding back from involvement as Hitler's army followed a program of expansion. Sherwood's antiwar position changed as he became increasingly outraged at Nazi aggression. He spent huge amounts of his own money to finance a media campaign to raise American consciousness about what was going on across the ocean. One result was that President Franklin Roosevelt brought Sherwood into his administration, first as a speechwriter in 1940, then putting him in charge of the overseas branch of the Office of War Information. After the war, Sherwood wrote a biography, *Roosevelt and Hopkins*, about the relationship between the president and Harry Hopkins, his most trusted advisor; it won the Pulitzer Prize for biography in 1949. He also won the Academy Award for best screenplay in 1946 for *The Best Years of Our Lives*, a drama about veterans readjusting to civilian life.

Sherwood's literary output declined in the years after the war. He wrote a few plays, but they were not well received. In his later life, he was recognized more for his political achievements than for his dramas or screenplays. He died in New York City in 1955 of a heart attack.

Plot Summary

Act 1

The Petrified Forest takes place in the diner of the Black Mesa Filling Station and Bar-B-Q in the desert of eastern Arizona on an autumn day in 1934. As the first scene opens, two telegraph linemen who are eating lunch at the diner discuss political theory. The First Lineman believes that the Russian Communist revolution is destined to spread to the rest of the world, and the second is skeptical. Jason Maple, the proprietor of the Black Mesa, enters and tells Boze, his employee, that there is a car outside waiting for gas. Gramp Maple, Jason's father, enters the linemen's conversation, telling about when he came to the desert fifty-six years earlier and about the interesting historical figures he has met, including Billy the Kid. Jason becomes annoyed at the First Lineman's support of Communism. As he leaves, the First Lineman mentions a massacre in Oklahoma, referring to Duke Mantee's escape from jail; throughout the rest of the scene, the approach of the Mantee gang is mentioned often.

Jason talks with Gramp about selling the Black Mesa so that he can use the money to open a motel in Los Angeles. When he goes to change for his American Legion meeting, his daughter Gabby is left alone with Boze. Boze is a former football star, and he is brash and cocky. He tries unsuccessfully to flirt with Gabby. He looks at the poetry she reads and is not interested; he shows her newspaper clippings about his college football glory, but she does not care.

A dusty hitchhiker, Alan Squier, enters the diner and orders food. Gramp talks to him about Mantee and about Billy the Kid. Gabby tells Squier about her ambition to go to France to study painting, after he notices her reading the poetry of a French writer. He tells her his story—that he wrote one novel and then lived in France for eight years trying to write another—with the wife he stole from his publisher —and Gabby begins to trust him enough to show her paintings, which she will not show anyone else. As they talk about their lives, she asks if he would like to run off to France with her, asking, "Wouldn't you like to be loved by me?" He admits his attraction but says he must leave. Gabby arranges for Squier to get a ride with the Chisolms, a wealthy couple with a chauffeur who have stopped for gas.

Before he leaves, Squier asks Gabby for one kiss, which is interrupted by Boze's entrance. Boze becomes threatening when Squier cannot pay his thirty-cent tab, but Gabby tells Squier to just leave and, in addition, gives him a dollar. When he is gone, Boze propositions Gabby again. Remembering the way Squier encouraged her to embrace life and upset about being rejected by him, she agrees to go out into the field with Boze, but they are stopped when Duke Mantee and his gang force them back into the diner.

Mantee is described in the stage directions as having "one quality of resemblance to Alan Squier; he too is unmistakably condemned." The workers are rounded up: Boze is

hostile and threatening, while Gramp Maple tells the gangsters how Old West marshal Wild Bill Hickock filed down the trigger catch on his gun so he could kill five men in quick succession. Mantee tells the cook to make some food, and he orders drinks for everyone—even Gramp, over Gabby's objections. Act 1 ends when Alan Squier reenters, saying that the Chisolms' car was hijacked by the Mantee gang. When he sees that he is in the middle of a hostage situation, he is excited: "It's pleasant to be back again—among the living. . . . Hooray!"

Act 2

Act 2 begins about a half hour after the end of act 1. It opens with Gramp telling stories of some more obscure killers he has known. They listen to a radio broadcast, which describes the search for Duke Mantee as "the greatest manhunt in human history." It mentions a second getaway car, populated by three men and a woman. They have stopped at the Black Mesa Bar-B-Q to rendezvous with the other members of the gang and specifically with the woman, Doris.

When Boze calls Squier to task for the liquor he has been drinking, Squier says that he can pay for it. Boze questions this, since he had no money to pay for his meal earlier, and Squier eventually admits that Gabby gave him a dollar. Angry, Boze starts to tell Squier about how she was prepared to go off and have sex with him before Mantee arrived, but Gabby stops him. Boze professes his love for her, and she, in turn, professes her love for Squier. Squier tells her that she should lavish her love on Duke: "There's your real mate—another child of nature." When she points out that he has been drinking too much, he explains that both he and Boze are suffering from impotence because the gangsters have taken control of their actions.

Mr. and Mrs. Chisolm and their chauffeur, Joseph, walk up, having waited for Squier to come back with help after the Mantee gang stole their car. Boze dives on a machine gun and gets the drop on Mantee, but Mrs. Chisolm enters and, seeing men with guns, screams. Her scream distracts Boze enough for Mantee to draw his pistol and fire, hitting him in the hand. He is led into the back room to be bandaged, but his heroic action makes Squier want to do something just as notable. Squier takes out a five-thousand-dollar life insurance policy from his bag and makes it out to Gabby, asking the Chisolms to act as witnesses, to make it legal. He then asks Mantee, who is already sentenced to die for multiple murders, to kill him before leaving the diner, and Mantee agrees.

There is tension when Pyles, the black member of the Mantee gang, offers a drink to Joseph, the Chisolms's black chauffeur. Joseph asks Mr. Chisolm if it is all right to accept the drink and Pyles finds his attitude degrading: "Ain't you heard about the big liberation?" he asks. "Come on—take your drink, weasel." Joseph drinks it, but only after Mr. Chisolm nods his permission.

As she becomes slightly drunk, Mrs. Chisolm turns against her husband. She responds to Gabby's idealism by recalling how her own family squelched her dreams of becoming

an actress and how she married Chisolm, a boring banker, in order to be respectable. She openly propositions Duke Mantee: he is uninterested, and her husband is embarrassed.

Jason Maple arrives at the Black Mesa with members of his American Legion post, and the gangsters capture them. They bring the news that the other part of the Mantee mob has been captured and that the woman, Doris, has become an informer for the federal agents who are hunting Duke. Mantee's associates tell him that they have to flee, quickly. He hesitates, and Squier encourages him not to let himself become wrapped up in thoughts of revenge but, instead, to run and be free. The local sheriff and his deputies surround the diner and have a shootout with the gangsters. Some members of the gang are killed. Mantee and the rest take hostages with them to ride on the car's running board as human shields. As he is leaving, Mantee turns and shoots Squier. The sheriff's men commandeer Jason's car to chase them, and the other characters, including Boze and Gramp, surround Squier and pronounce their respect for him as he dies.

Act 1

Act 1 Summary

The Petrified Forest is a two-act play that tells the story of three main characters, Gabby Maple, Alan Squier and Duke Mantee whose lives reach climactic points one night in a diner in Eastern Arizona in 1934. The setting is the Black Mesa Filling Station and Bar-B-Q owned by Jason Maple, Gabby's father.

As the play opens diner employee, Boze Hertzlinger, converses with two customers employed as telephone linemen. The discussion is about the benefits of communism which have been raised by the first lineman and strenuously objected to by Boze. Jason, who is a member of the local American Legion, takes particular offense to the lineman's un-American viewpoints and asks the men to leave.

Gramp Maple, Jason's father, has been observing the scene and advises Jason not to engage in verbal conflict with rebellious men like the ones who just left. Jason's frustrations are not limited to the recent encounter with the lineman however and the challenge from Gramp spurs Jason to reveal his discontent with his life in the desert.

The business will never make the family rich and Jason wants to sell yet Gramp will not concede his share. Jason's dream is to move to Los Angeles where his skills as an auto mechanic will practically ensure a healthy income in the burgeoning area.

Jason's daughter, Gabby, joins her father and grandfather and tells them that the cook has just heard on the radio about a manhunt for gangster Duke Mantee who is supposedly headed in the direction of the diner. Jason's respect for the local law agencies gives him confidence that the gangster is no immediate threat to the diner and continues to his American Legion meeting.

With the boss gone, Boze seizes the opportunity to make romantic advances toward Gabby who has no interest, preferring her book of French poetry to Boze's college football hero overtures. Much to Gabby's relief, Alan Squier enters the diner from hours of hitchhiking and walking on his way to the Pacific Ocean.

During dinner, Alan shares with Gabby, that he is a writer who is divorced from a wealthy European woman whom he met during his days as a gigolo in France. This story fascinates Gabby who wants nothing more than to live in France and live an artist's life. Visions of the romance and cultural sites are only part of her dream though as she also wants to see her mother who lives there. Although Gabby's mother is now remarried with three other children, Gabby feels better suited for a European life as opposed to the flat, dull life in the desert she shares with her father and grandfather.

After Gramp dies, Gabby plans to take her inheritance and go to France and Jason plans to take his money to Los Angeles. Encouraged by Alan's interest in her artistic

sensibilities, Gabby shares some small paintings she has been working on. Interrupted by Herb, a local cowboy, Gabrielle is quick to hide the art from prying eyes.

Herb has come to the diner for beer and moonshine for some of the men on the lookout for Duke Mantee. Returning to the discussion on art, Alan compliments Gabby on her efforts that spur her enthusiasm, knowing that the proper training at a French art school would do wonders for her paintings.

Gabby's dreams include the lush scenery and vibrant spirit of Paris yet she is trapped in the flat life and landscape of the desert. Alan tries to get Gabby to understand perspective and to appreciate what she has, as there are probably artists in Paris who wish they had the broad canvas of the desert on which to work.

Other than those broad generalizations, Alan is not able to provide much insight on the artistic life in Europe. Alan is tired and bored with the idle pursuits of the rich from which he has fled. Preferring intellectual stimulation, Alan seeks dialogue on his theory that Nature will ultimately prevail in spite of the weapons men choose to subdue it.

According to Alan, Nature is striking back now not with the typical measures of natural disasters but with the plague of human neuroses. To Alan's way of thinking, Nature cannot be harnessed or destroyed because it will always prevail. The way of the intellectual is being reduced to the way of primates.

In over her head with this line of thinking, Gabby changes the subject to Alan's destination. When he finds out that the road outside leads to the Petrified Forest, Alan is delighted in the metaphor that an old fossil like himself should end up with other decaying life forms. Gabby doesn't like this line of conversation either and tells Alan that she would like to go to France with him.

Alan's finances have been exhausted and no amount of charm or hitchhiking can get him back across the Atlantic. Gabby won't be daunted though and tells Alan of the money she will inherit from her grandfather in addition to her share of the diner. In exchange for Alan's escorting to her France, she will live with him out of marriage, a proposal that had never occurred to the unsuspecting Alan.

Unwilling to raise Gabby's hopes any further; Alan prepares to leave and admits that he has no money to pay for his meal. Boze overhears this fact and explodes at Alan's taking advantage of Gabby's kindness. The two men engage in a minor conflict that is interrupted by the arrival of some new customers, The Chisholms who have been driving from Ohio on their way to California.

Mr. and Mrs. Chisholm are a well-to-do couple accompanied by their elegantly dressed driver, Joseph. Their stop for gas results in Gabby's asking them to take Alan along as far as Phoenix, their stopping point for the night. As Alan leaves, Gabby presses a silver dollar in his hand and asks for a postcard from California when his final destination is reached. Alan promises repayment of the money someday and Gabby wishes that they see each other in France someday.

With all the customers gone, Boze continues his romantic advances on Gabby whose defenses are wearing thin in light of her quest for experience of all kind. Boze promises that his lessons about nature are guaranteed to be much more pleasant than those Alan had been preaching about.

The sound of a car at the gas pump outside separates Boze and Gabby's embrace and a gangster named Jackie bursts into the diner. Quickly patting down Boze for guns and doing a speedy search of the diner, Jackie clears the way for Duke Mantee. Duke has entered the diner and demands to know who else is in the building and what is in each of the rooms. Two other men, Pyles and Ruby, accompany Duke and act as guards at the door and at their car.

Pyle forces Gramp and Paula, the cook, into the main room of the diner. The men force Paula back into the kitchen to prepare food but Gramp remains in the dining room and acts the part of a congenial host to celebrity guests. Gramp's claim to fame is that he was shot at by Wild Bill Hickock, and he imagines that this bit of information catapults his esteem in front of the gangsters.

Suddenly Alan reappears panting and out of breath to report that the gangsters had stolen the Chisholms' car. At that point, Alan sees Duke and realizes the serious situation of all those inside the diner. Duke cautions everyone to stay calm and be prepared to wait awhile. Alan exhibits unnatural enthusiasm for the circumstances and feels that destiny and killing have facilitated his return to the diner tonight.

Act 1 Analysis

The power of nature and its vitality is a strong theme throughout the play. Gabby's youthful enthusiasm is in direct contrast to Alan's resigned fatalistic attitude. Each of them wants what the other has, but there are benefits and drawbacks to their positions that must be lived appropriately with the stages of life. It's ironic that Alan is so aware of nature's potency when he is almost depleted of any life force himself.

Alan has seen the destruction of relationships between people and the one within himself that has reduced him to such a volatile state. Nature will always prevail over man via external or internal methods and Alan's defenses are completely gone. He is a man with a hollow core having been drained by neglecting his soul for superficial pursuits.

Gabby, however, represents everything idealistic especially as it relates to the artistic life she imagines in France. It's possible that much of her perspective is clouded by rejection and the need for approval by a mother who now lives a completely separate life in Europe. Whatever her reasons, Gabby represents hope and the willingness to learn at any risk. Her idealism is falling prey to the Bose's bumbling overtures just because she yearns for excitement and experience at almost any cost.

The play has important historical context for its issues regarding post-Depression era recovery. Jason and Gabby are trapped in the diner barely making a decent living; Alan

is penniless; Gramp has buried his money; and the Chisholms are well to do. The contrasts of the economic struggles, still rampant in America in 1934, are symbolized by each of these character's situations.

The element of organized crime and legalized liquor which have gained prominence at this point in America's history are also represented by Duke and his gang as well as the play's setting in a diner where booze and moonshine are sold.

Act 2

Act 2 Summary

Personalities surface as the gangsters keep the diner employees and patrons captive. Gramp continues to talk as if he's hosting important guests; Boze is contentious seeing the captivity as a threat to his manhood; Alan is resigned as he is to everything; and Gabby doesn't seem phased. The radio reports Duke's gang's recent killing spree and warns residents to be on guard. The gang members congratulate each other on their recent success and continuing notoriety.

In an attempt to ingratiate himself with the gangsters, Gramp tries to talk to Duke about the gang's plans. Ultimately the captives learn that Duke is waiting on a few more gang members and Duke's girlfriend to arrive as the diner had been selected as the designated meeting place.

Alan has been steadily drinking rye and Boze challenges his ability to pay for it. Gabby admits to giving Alan a dollar earlier that incites Boze's jealousy and admission of love for Gabby. Alan refuses to spar with Boze preferring to talk to Duke about his wish to be buried at the Petrified Forest. For Alan, the forest symbolizes the graveyard of civilized thought including all outdated thinking such as patriotism, romance and even Adam Smith's economics.

While Duke is engaged in conversation, Boze steals Duke's machine gun but his attempt to subdue Duke is thwarted by the screams of Mrs. Chisholm who has just entered the diner with her husband and their driver. Duke shoots Boze in the hand and Boze retreats to his place with the other captives and curses at the Chisholms for interfering with an act of bravery.

Mrs. Chisholm curses their luck for taking Alan as a hitchhiker that brings them back to the diner. Alan apologizes for their misfortune yet admits he is prepared to die and retrieves his life insurance policy from his bag and signs the full amount over to Gabby as the beneficiary. Gabby is tending to Boze's wound in the restroom and is not aware of this gracious gesture and Alan cautions the rest of the captives to keep silent.

Alan's only request is that Duke kill him as soon as possible so that Gabby may secure the insurance money and go to France and live her dream. Alan feels that he is of no value to Gabby while alive but once she has access to his insurance money, she can leave the restricted life she has now and that would be Alan's greatest gesture of love. Duke agrees to Alan's request and Alan is nervous yet somehow satisfied.

The insurance policy is entrusted to Gramp who believes that there is no woman who is worth that amount of money. Alan thinks the old man to be a fool as any woman is worth everything a man can give, financially and emotionally; it is the reason for man's

existence. Alan explains to Gramp that Gabby represents the future and her vitality is essential to the entire world.

Moved by Alan's comments, Mrs. Chisholm chides her husband to pay attention to this poignant display of passion, something that has disappeared from her life since she has been married to Mr. Chisholm. In the heat of the moment, Mrs. Chisholm, emboldened by liquor, even propositions Duke in an attempt to arouse some display of affection from her husband.

Gabby has returned from taking care of Boze and Mrs. Chisholm pleads with the young girl to discover passion and to not give up all her dreams for the sake of marriage to a man whose real love is money and power. That is all the encouragement Gabby needs and she falls to her knees in front of Alan and begs to go with him.

Suddenly Jason appears with two fellow American Legion members as they're escorted into the diner by one of the gangsters. The legionnaires inform Duke that the rest of the gang, including Duke's girlfriend, has been caught and has revealed information about Duke's getaway plans. It is just a matter of time before Duke will also be captured and for the first time his cool countenance is rattled by indecision.

Duke doesn't have long to consider options as the sounds of gunfire ring out from the law enforcement agencies that have surrounded the diner. Duke points out the Chisholms, Joseph and two of the legionnaires to ride the sideboards of the gang's getaway car as shields. Fearing that Duke has forgotten his promise, Alan jumps to his feet calling out for Duke who asks Alan if he still wants it. The matter is out of Alan's hands now; Duke shoots Alan and rushes from the diner.

The remaining captives are in shock that Duke has carried out the murderous promise, especially Gabby who is unaware that the shooting was Alan's request. Gramp informs Gabby of the insurance policy and she vows to bury Alan in the Petrified Forest that had been his request.

Jason comes back inside the dining room and lets the others know that Duke has released the captives he had taken with him and calls the Sheriff's office to notify the authorities of the evening's events and the location of Duke Mantee and his gang.

Act 2 Analysis

The progression of time is another critical theme in this play. All things age and disappear in order to make way for the new. Alan represents the prosperity of the 1920's that has been dead since the Great Depression and his willingness to die shadows his understanding of his uselessness in the world and the futility of any renewed efforts on his part anymore. Gabby's vitality and hopefulness, symbols of economic recovery in America, are appealing to Alan but they are qualities that are no longer within his reach.

There is also the representation of the class system in America as represented by The Chisholms on one end of the spectrum all the way down to the obvious subservience of

their Negro driver. All the other characters struggle in their own ways to keep level footing, but are all diminished by financial loss and attempts at recovery.

Alan's character also brings the social issue of women's rights to light with his stance of the value of women being critical to men's reasons for being. Mrs. Chisholm validates the position when she agrees with what Alan says and encourages Gabby to pursue her dreams and not squelch them in favor of a man's, especially for a loveless marriage.

Alan's choice of death so that Gabby may benefit is the ultimate gesture of love and symbolizes his last act of noblesse oblige available with his diminished resources. The act is also a metaphor for the death of all outdated notions and intellectual pursuits that have fossilized just like the trees in the Petrified Forest.

Characters

Edith Chisolm

Mrs. Chisolm is a society lady who seems, at first, to be very concerned with being proper. Her stuffiness misleads audiences, who are shocked when, later in the play, she propositions Mantee openly in front of everyone, including her husband. She spends a long time drinking liquor and listening to Gabby's frustrated dreams of being an artist and then tells Gabby about her own plans to be an actress when she was Gabby's age. She says that her dream was dashed by her family, who wanted her to remain respectable. "And before I knew it, I was married to *this* pillar of the mortgage loan and trust," she says, indicating her husband. After encouraging Gabby to run off to France, she compliments Mantee on being a "real man," and when someone notes that it sounds as if Mantee has had an offer, she says, "He certainly has! And it was made with all sincerity, too." In the end, she and her husband are taken as hostages, as the gangsters escape.

Mr. Chisolm

Chisolm is a wealthy, cautious, somewhat cheap man. He arrives at the Black Mesa with his wife in a chauffeured car. Inquiring about the cigars for sale, he hears the price of one kind and opts for the less expensive brand. Before he is willing to take Squier, a hitchhiker, across the desert in his car, he has his chauffeur check him for weapons. Still, his precautions do not protect him from the Mantee gang, who steal his car. When the Chisolms walk back to the Black Mesa, he offers Duke Mantee money to let them go; Mantee just takes the money from him without bargaining. Later, he is further humiliated when his wife tells everyone about what an unsatisfactory life she has led and offers herself sexually to Duke Mantee.

A Deputy

The Sheriff runs onstage with two deputies at the end of the play, while they are pursuing Mantee. The first deputy never speaks.

Another Deputy

Pursuing the Mantee gang at the end of the play, the second deputy calls out from offstage that his car has been disabled because the tires have been shot out.

First Telegraph Lineman

Of the two telegraph linemen who eat at the Black Mesa in the beginning of the first act, the one labeled First Lineman talks of the good things that are being done in Communist Russia for the cause of social equality. The Second Lineman calls him "Nick." Jason Maple threatens him for being critical of America, and he calls Jason "Mr. Tin Horn Patriot."

Herb

Herb is a regular customer of the Black Mesa, who comes in early in the play to buy moonshine liquor and beer because he is going to be in a posse that the sheriff has sworn in to capture Duke Mantee. In the end, when Mantee is pursued, Herb is enthusiastic about shooting him.

Boze Hertzlinger

Boze is a gas station attendant and former football player who represents physical virility in the play. He played football for Nevada Tech, and in his wallet he carries an old clipping of a newspaper article that praised his athletic ability. He tries to sweet-talk Gabby into giving up her virtue to him, trying to convince her that he loves her and that she just may, deep in her heart, love him too. She is on the verge of giving in to him when the Mantee gang shows up. While they are being tied up, Boze tells Gabby he loves her. When he finds out that she loves Squier, though, he starts to tell the people in the diner how close Gabby came to giving in to him. To prove his love for her, he makes a daring leap to grab a shotgun but ends up being shot in the hand by Mantee. He is led offstage to have his wound bandaged and does not come back until the end of the play.

Jackie

A member of Mantee's gang, Jackie makes suggestive comments to Paula, the cook, as he leads her out back to tie her up. Later, during the shootout, Jackie is supposed to be defending the rear of the building. It is when he hears that Jackie has been shot that Duke knows he has to flee.

Joseph

The Chisolms' chauffeur Joseph is deferential to his employers, and Pyles is angry with him. Pyles is also black, but because he is a gangster, he does not have to act subservient. Even when Pyles controls the situation by holding a gun on the Chisolms Joseph refuses to take a drink until he has Mr. Chisolm's permission. During the play's final gun battle, Joseph cries out in prayer.

Legion Commander

The Legion Commander is the Commander of the Ralph M. Kesterling post of the American Legion, and is leading his men in a search party. The stage notes describe him as "a peppery little man." When they are caught by the gangsters at the diner, he gives Duke the news that his comrades have been captured.

Duke Mantee

Mantee is a famous gangster who is on the run from the law and ends up at the Black Mesa. His escape from prison and subsequent crime spree is the subject of gossip and media coverage long before he arrives. When he does show up, near the end of act 1, he turns out to be more courteous and soft-spoken than the ruthless killer that he's been described to be. He offers the diner's food and drinks freely to his hostages. He also steals from the rich Chisolms without any hesitation, even showing a sense of amusement.

Even though it delays his escape to the Mexican border, Duke insists that his companions must wait at the Black Mesa for another part of his gang, which includes a blonde woman, Doris. He is almost cheerful about agreeing to kill Squier when Squier asks him to, indicating that Mantee might no take the request seriously. In the end, though, Mantee finds out that he has been betrayed by Doris, and the cold-blooded killer in him comes out. He shoots Squier on his way out, indicating either his frustration at the world or his sympathy for Squier's disillusionment.

Gabby Maple

The female lead of the play, Gabrielle "Gabby" Maple reads and writes poetry and paints pictures. She is faithful to her father and kind to her grandfather, but she is also tough and uses coarse language. Her mother was French and divorced Gabby's father when Gabby was young. Each year when she was young, Gabby received a book from her mother, but the books were in French, and she could not read them. Gabby feels her life would be fulfilled if she could just go to France to study art. She is mildly interested in Boze's flirtations until she meets Alan Squier, who embodies all of the artistic sensibilities that she admires: he is the only one she will show her paintings to, and they are so abstract that he has to ask her, "Is—this a portrait of someone?" When he leaves, she is bitter enough to give in to Boze, just for the experience of it, but is stopped by the gangsters' arrival. When Squier comes back to the diner, he becomes more and more drawn to Gabby's idealism, until he eventually declares his deep love for her.

Gramp Maple

Gramp owns the Black Mesa Diner and refuses to sell it, even though his son and granddaughter would like to leave Arizona. He is something of a rebel in that he has fond memories of the time he met Billy the Kid, who once shot at him, and he is a fan of Duke Mantee and follows the gangster's exploits in the newspaper. When Gramp came to Arizona from Virginia in the 1870s, the area was Indian territory, and he and men like him took their lives into their own hands, running the first telegraph cable. He considers himself a pioneer and feels that life in the modern world has lost the pioneering spirit. "The trouble with this country is, it got settled," Gramp tells Gabby. During the course of the play, Jason is disrespectful to him, telling him to not talk to the customers, and Gabby follows Jason's command that Gramp cannot have a drink. When Duke arrives, he returns Gramp's respect at first by telling the others to give him what he wants, but later he becomes protective and says that Gramp should not drink, because Gabby says so.

Jason Maple

The manager of the Black Mesa, Jason Maple is a patriotic American and a loyal member of the American Legion. Jason proves to be crude, telling his father to "shut up," and vain in the ornate uniform he wears to his Legion meeting. Jason is a veteran of the war, although he did not see combat: he drove a truck, which is a point he is very defensive about when Gramp ridicules his American Legion uniform. He plans to move to Los Angeles when Gramp sells the diner. Jason leaves for a Legion meeting early in the play and shows up later with a posse of Legionnaires that is looking for Mantee. They are taken hostage, and Jason feels betrayed when the troops that he was helping to hunt Mantee shoot up his restaurant and then commandeer his car to chase after the fleeing gang.

The Other Legionnaire

When the American Legion troops enter the diner with Jason and are captured by Mantee, the Other Legionnaire (referred to by the stage name "Other") alternates with the Legion Commander in telling of the capture of Doris and the other members of Duke's gang. He is introduced in the stage notes as "burly and stupid."

Paula

Paula is the Mexican cook at the Black Mesa.

Pyles

Pyles is the African-American member of the Mantee gang. When he offers a drink to the Chisolms' chauffeur and the chauffeur asks for Mr. Chisolm's permission before drinking it, a stage direction tells performers that Pyles is "ashamed for his race." Later, when he interrupts Squier's declaration of love because he is worried for his life, Mrs. Chisolm tells him, "Be quiet—you black gorilla." Instead of standing up for Pyles, Mantee tells him, "She pegged you, all right, Pyles."

Ruby

A member of Duke Mantee's gang.

Second Telegraph Lineman

The Second Lineman is an instigator. He encourages Gramp to tell his stories of the Old West and the First Lineman to talk about Communist principles, and he seems just as amused by each.

Sheriff

At the end of the play, the Sheriff and his deputies enter the diner in pursuit of Mantee's gang. They take Jason Maple's car, over his objection, to chase the gangsters who have fled in the Chisolms' Duesenberg.

Alan Squier

Squier is a disillusioned intellectual who eyes other people's concerns with ironic humor but who ends up dying for love. Squier was born in 1901, and when he was twenty-two, he wrote a novel that was "very, very stark." It sold poorly, and the publisher lost money on it; then the publisher's wife divorced him and married Squier. For eight years he lived on the Riviera, trying to write another book, with his wife paying the bills, which he describes to Gabby as being "a gigolo." He defines himself as a member of a vanishing breed, intellectuals who have conquered nature and now have no purpose to their lives. After his meal, he admits that he has no money to pay, showing no concern or embarrassment. When Gabby offers him a dollar, he accepts it from her. When he ends up back at the Black Mesa, Squier is happy to be part of the hostage situation. He drinks liquor and encourages Duke Mantee and his gang to run from the law. Although he is without ideals himself, Squier tells Mantee to be true to his plan: "Don't betray yourself," he tells him. "Go on, run for the border—and take your illusions with you!" Boze's heroic act of defiance spurs Squier to his own heroic act: he makes Gabby the beneficiary of a five thousand dollar life insurance policy and asks Mantee to kill him, which Mantee does as he is leaving in the end.

Themes

Social Order

The Petrified Forest raises questions about the prevailing social order from the moment the curtain rises. The first person to talk is a Communist sympathizer, and his first line is, "Certainly it's Revolution!" This character explains what he thinks about capitalism and its flaws. Throughout the course of the play, readers can see that Robert Sherwood is not endorsing communism. He does, however, recognize that there is something wrong with the existing social order, and so he is open-minded about different ideas about how society should run.

The current social order is represented in the play by Jason Maple, who wears an ornate uniform to his American Legion meeting and opposes things that he finds un-American. Jason's own father mocks his uniform and points out that he was not even involved in active fighting while he was in the service, which shows Jason's patriotic fervor to be based more on appearances than on substance. Gramp finds the American Legion's militaristic attitude to be a sign that they are soft, or too refined. "The trouble with this country is, it's got settled," Gramp explains.

Gramp favors gangsters, who fight to disrupt the social order, over Legionnaires, who fight to maintain it. He speaks glowingly of killers with whom he has associated, fascinated by their deeds. The mystique of the gangster is that he rejects society's laws and places himself above them, which makes him more free than those who accept the law.

Mrs. Chisolm proves the attraction of lawbreakers by choosing the gangster Duke Mantee, whom she calls a "real man," over her socially powerful husband. Sherwood has her recall how the established social order made her turn away from her heart's desire, which was to be an actress, showing how being socially acceptable has led her to eye her husband with contempt.

Although the play raises doubts about the prevailing social order, it is that social order that triumphs in the end. Duke Mantee, the social misfit, is hunted down; Squier, the lone traveler, ends up dead. The only one to benefit is Gabby, from the insurance money she will inherit.

Peril

The main element for change in the lives of this play's characters is their awareness that their lives are in danger. The threat of death makes them give up all pretensions. For instance, in the early part of the play, Boze puts on an act of arrogant overconfidence. When Gabby notes that he thinks a lot of himself, he responds, "Who wouldn't, in my position?" But when the gangsters hold him at gunpoint, Boze mutters vague, barely coherent threats that are easily laughed away. In the same way, Squier tries to keep up

his carefree attitude while being held hostage, but his good humor is strained and can only be maintained with drinking. As he drinks, he becomes more depressed and filled with self-loathing, telling Gabby that his problem is "the same disease that's affecting Boze! Impotence!" He is not talking about sexual impotence but rather the inability to take action in the face of mortal danger.

Things change when Boze faces the danger they are in directly: he grabs a shotgun and turns it on Mantee. His move fails, but at least he has broken the sense of doom. Alan Squier is not the type of man to handle a gun, but seeing Boze face death encourages him to face death in his own way, by asking Mantee to shoot him, which Gramp, in the end, calls "a hero's death."

One other character whose life is affected by peril is Duke Mantee himself. He does not talk about Doris, who is supposed to meet him at the Black Mesa, but audiences can tell that he loves her, because he seems blind to the danger that he is in, needing the members of his gang and Alan Squier to shout it at him. As the play progresses, Mantee finds himself paralyzed, torn between the instinctive desire to keep himself out of peril and the desire to wait for her or, later, the desire for revenge once he finds out she has betrayed him.

Man versus Nature

This play presents a clear view of the way that man's intellectual ability separates him from his natural, instinctive functions. It assigns each human tendency, intellect and instinct, to the two main male leads, who are physically linked, according to Sherwood's stage direction, by the fact that they are both "unmistakably condemned." Squier feels a loss of meaning in his life because he has become alienated from nature. He describes himself as having "brains without purpose. Noise without sound. Shape without substance." He is one of the intellectuals who felt that they had subdued Nature, only to find that nature is fighting back with neuroses. Gabby, who has been raised in a difficult land and has never had a real chance to express herself intellectually, is impressed with Squier's intellectual ability and finds him much more interesting than Boze, who is earthy and physical.

Squier, in turn, admires Duke Mantee, who is able to act unselfconsciously in a way that he himself never can. He calls Mantee a "child of Nature," suited to be Gabby's "mate." It is a great disappointment when, in the end, he finds that Mantee does not act instinctively to save his own life by running but, instead, complicates his action by thinking about going to Doris to take revenge for her betrayal. Squier tells him that going for his revenge would be a betrayal of himself: he would be overriding his instinct for self-preservation with a complex, purely human emotion.

Morals and Morality

Alan Squier arrives at the Black Mesa empty of any morals. He defines himself as a gigolo, who made his living for years taking his wife's money in exchange for being her

sexual plaything. He turns down Gabby's offer to travel with him, happy to have the opportunity to remember her and to think that he might have been able to sin. He lists all of the philosophical and religious systems he can think of and proclaims that they are as dead as the trees in the Petrified Forest. The play represents Squier's moral growth. Through some combination of jealousy for Boze's grand gesture that got him shot and the shadow of his own lost values that he sees in Gabby, he builds a rudimentary sense of morality. It is not very complex and has only one level—all that he does for the rest of his short life is done in order to assure her ability to go to France, as she has always dreamed. Still, it is a moral system in that it gives him something to live for beyond immediate pleasure or pain.

It is ironic, then, that Squier almost makes Gabby give up her own morality. She comes away from their first conversation together with his assurance that there is nothing very magical about France, which she has pinned her hopes on. She later tells Boze that she was willing to have sex with him (Boze) because she thought, "I'd better get rid of all the girlish bunk that was in me, like thinking so much about going to France, and Art, and dancing in the streets." Having learned from Squier that only experience counts, regardless of whether it is in France or the American desert, she nearly gives in to Boze's vulgar propositions, just to see what sex is like. Later, she looks in horror at what she almost did, realizing what a violation of her own sense of morality it would have been. As Squier is rebuilding his own moral sense, which has been worn down by years of abstract intellectualism, Gabby is learning to defend her own morality from the same intellectual void.

Style

Convention

The Petrified Forest uses an age-old dramatic convention which takes a set of diverse characters and creates some reason why they have to remain together in some confined space, in order to keep the actors on stage together throughout the performance. Plays have used such conventional devices as a social gathering, such as a wedding, birthday party, or poker game; or a closed method of transportation, such as a lifeboat or elevator. In Robert Sherwood's next play, *Idiot's Delight* (1936), travelers are forced to remain in a hotel in Europe when bombs start dropping at the start of World War II. In his play *Key Largo* (1939), a Florida hurricane makes it impossible for anyone to leave the premises of a hotel. (Another reason they are unable to leave is that, as in *The Petrified Forest*, the hotel staff and guests are being held by gangsters who are waiting to join others from their mob.) Because the traditional stage is a rectangle at the front of the theater, audiences have become accustomed to conventions that bring strangers together into one con-fined space, and they tend to accept them even when such gatherings would seem highly improbable in the real world.

Denouement

Denouement is a French word meaning "the unknotting." In literary criticism, it is used to refer to the part of the story that comes after the climax, when the various plot complications are resolved.

In *The Petrified Forest*, the climax comes when Duke Mantee shoots Alan Squier. It is the one definitive moment at the end of the play, the one action that settles issues that had been left open. Once Squier asks Mantee to shoot him, early in the second act, the situation is out of his hands. It is no longer his decision about whether Mantee goes through with it; it is Mantee's decision alone. Audiences are given several clues to make them believe that Mantee might not kill Squier even after he has said that he will. First, the fact that he only wounds Boze, who is trying to kill him, indicates that his reputation as a cold-blooded killer might be exaggerated. He seems to find a soft spot in his heart for people, particularly Gramp Maple, and so one could easily believe that he never really intended to shoot someone who poses no threat to him. In addition, the whole play seems to be a test of Squier's character, so that once he has found meaning in his life by professing his love for Gabby, there is no dramatic reason why he has to die. Still, in spite of all of the indicators to the contrary, Mantee shows himself to be the murderer that his friends and the newspapers say he is.

After the climactic moment when Squier is killed, several interesting, but not necessary, things happen in the denouement. Boze, who had been his rival for Gabby's affection, pronounces him "a good guy"; Gramp says he was "a hero," raising a question of what it

really means to be heroic; and Gabby deals with her grief courageously, reciting a poem that gives her comfort in her time of need, which signifies that her artistic ideals have not been shattered by the day's proceedings. These are all aspects of the characters that might have gone differently, but the play's denouement is showing audiences what the future holds for them.

What the denouement does not give is the fate of Duke Mantee. There are hints that the manhunt is closing in on him and that the chase will only last as long as it takes radio-alerted policemen to pull him over. There is, however, just as much evidence that the same cunning and ruthlessness that has helped him escape before will serve him again and that he will always be on the run.

Antihero

An antihero is a main character in a play that does not have the traditional qualities that a hero possesses, such as courage, strength, or idealism. In *The Petrified Forest*, Alan Squier is very honest about the fact that he does not have any of these traits. He tells Gabby when he first meets her, "I've been hoping to find something that's worth living for—and worth dying for." He wants to be buried in the Petrified Forest because it represents "the world of outmoded ideas." When he is taken prisoner, he asks for whiskey and passes drinks around to the others. He even tells Mantee that he is no threat to the gunman's "superiority," saying, "[i]f I had a machine gun, I wouldn't know what to do with it." Despite the fact that he does not have the traditional qualities of a hero, audiences can take interest in how Alan Squier comes out of this situation because they care for him. They admire his honesty, even though it does replace courage and ideals. When Gramp says that he died "a hero's death," he is giving new meaning to the word "hero," expanding it to mean someone who has done a supremely selfless act, even though he is not technically a hero.

Historical Context

Organized Crime

A new era for crime in America arose in the 1920s when the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution ushered in Prohibition. For decades, temperance groups had fought to outlaw alcohol, citing clear and overwhelming evidence of its negative effect on society. Sale and consumption of liquor was prohibited in the United States from January 1, 1920, until 1933, when the Eighteenth Amendment was repealed.

An unanticipated result of Prohibition was that it gave rise to a criminal class that had previously been scattered. Even though it was illegal, people still wanted liquor and were willing to pay for it, which meant that there was a handsome profit to be made for anyone willing to flout the law. In small towns and rural areas, moon shiners, who made their own product in stills put together out of copper kettles and tubing, often provided liquor. Local people, sometimes even those involved in law enforcement, knew who had the stills, and they went to them for moonshine. Prohibition, therefore, served to blur the line between criminals and law-abiding citizens. Instead of making alcohol socially unacceptable, it often ended up making it socially acceptable to ignore the law.

The effect of Prohibition on organized crime was even more powerful in urban areas. In cities, people could not operate stills with open fires, at least not to provide as much liquor as was required. Criminal syndicates rose up to illegally import alcohol from other countries, usually Canada or Cuba. The benefits gained from unity, from pooling resources of transportation, offshore connections, and political influence, made it worthwhile to combine forces, creating larger mobs, while the competition from different mobs going after the same customer base gave rise to violent gangland wars. The image of gangsters firing Thompson submachine guns ("Tommy guns") that is commonly evoked as an element of the Roaring Twenties comes from the public's full awareness of the turf battles that were being played out in city streets by gangsters whose names were becoming nationally familiar, such as Dutch Schultz, "Bugs" Moran, and Al Capone.

Bank Robbers

While Prohibition made public personages out of criminals, it was the Great Depression that made them popular. The depression began after the stock market crash of October 1929: within two years, U.S. stocks lost around $50 billion, which had a rippling effect on the economy. Banks that lost money from investments had to call in loans; businesses that had borrowed from the banks had to lay off workers; unemployed workers had to draw what money they had out of banks and then default on their mortgages, causing even tighter financial conditions.

A certain class of criminal arose, one that realized that the only way to get money was to go to where it was kept, the banks, and steal it at gunpoint. They targeted banks in small towns, generally, where the security would be lax. Different career bank robbers were known for their different approaches: Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow, for instance, were polite to their victims, whereas George "Baby Face" Nelson gained a reputation as a ruthless homicidal maniac. John Dillinger was recognized as the most important of them all, having been named by J. Edgar Hoover, the director of the FBI, as "public enemy number one." Bonnie and Clyde, Pretty Boy Floyd, Baby Face Nelson, and Dillinger were all killed in shoot-outs with authorities in separate incidents in 1934, the year before this play was produced.

As opposed to the urban mob figures, the bank robbers found a place in the imaginations of the American people who, like Gramp Maple in *The Petrified Forest*, idealized them as folk heroes, much as an earlier generation had done for thieves like Jesse James and Billy the Kid. Those who were made suddenly poor by the depression found a sense of empowerment by watching the bandits rob the banks they felt had cheated them out of their money. The majority of Americans were poor, and many found the direct criminals more sympathetic than the ones who made their fortune manipulating the system. As folk singer Woody Guthrie put it in his song "The Ballad of Pretty Boy Floyd," which lionized the notorious criminal as a modern-day Robin Hood, "Some will rob you with a six gun, / And some with a fountain pen." A later line from the same song notes: "And as through your life you travel, yes and through your life you roam / You won't never see an outlaw drive a family from their home."

Movie Gangsters

During the depression, Hollywood, and in particular the Warner Brothers Studio, made a series of films that focused upon criminals. The first was *Little Caesar,* in 1930, starring Edward G. Robin-son as Rico, a small-time hood who rises to wealth and power through sheer ruthlessness. The film makes grand drama out of the inherent complexities of the criminal lifestyle: in the end, Rico, having decimated his enemies, is betrayed by a man that he could not bring himself to kill, out of friendship. The film was a huge success, and Warner Brothers quickly followed it with *Public Enemy,* starring James Cagney, who surprised audiences who were used to seeing him act in sophisticated comedies. Like Rico, Cagney's Tom Powers starts small and ends big, losing his humanity along the way. What these films had, and what the dozens of gangster films that followed tried unsuccessfully to copy, was strong central performances by actors who could hold audiences' sympathies while frightening them with their machine-like determination. The film-gangsters' mastery of their worlds allowed victims of the depression to imagine that success was available to anyone but that the moral cost was not worth it.

The gangster film cycle burned itself out quickly. By 1933, America had elected a new president, and the optimism of Roosevelt's New Deal edged out the nation's panic over a free-falling economy. Protests over the gangster films' excessive sex and violence made studio executives realize that public tastes had changed, and escapist musicals

became the new trend. Still, the American archetype of the doomed, machine-gun-wielding bandit had been established, and it remains with us today.

Critical Overview

The Petrified Forest is generally considered to be the start of Robert Sherwood's most prolific period as a playwright, during which he won three Pulitzer Prizes for drama within five years. Even when *The Petrified Forest* was first produced, it was recognized as a sign of a major literary career. Brian Doherty, writing in the magazine *Canadian Forum,* noted that this play and the one Sherwood wrote before it, *Reunion in Vienna*, "definitely establish Sherwood's right to be ranked as one of the leading American dramatists." Many critics found the play to be technically complex and intellectually challenging in its structure. One was John Howard Lawson, who used it as an example in his 1936 essay, "The Technique of the Modern Play." Lawson observed how Sherwood's approach to his material was "as static as the point of view of the hero," identifying only one real action in the entire production, when Mantee kills Squier at the end. "From a structural point of view," Lawson wrote, "the deed is neither climactic nor spontaneous, because it is a *repetition-situation.*" This acknowledgement of the play's lack of traditional dramatic action in its structure is not a criticism, just an acknowledgement of the style Sherwood used to capture Squier's intellectual condition.

Edith J. R. Isaacs, on the other hand, was openly critical of the way Sherwood handled the situation in *The Petrified Forest*. In her essay "Rob-ert Sherwood: Man of the Hour," which was written near the height of Sherwood's dramatic career in 1939, she praised the craftsmanship he displayed in *Reunion in Vienna* but went on to say that "[t]hen, to disturb the critics' placidity, came *The Petrified Forest*, with one of the best first acts Sherwood has ever written . . . and with a second act that rides full tilt into the most specious hokum with which the playwright has ever made a compromise." Isaacs conceded that the structure of the play is meant to show the contrast between Squier's inability to act and Mantee's violent outburst at the end, but she did not think his attempt to combine structure and content was successful, nor did she find it worth doing in this case. "It is sincerely hoped that Mr. Sherwood regrets writing *The Petrified Forest* after *Reunion in Vienna*," Isaacs wrote.

Critics in general have not been as harsh in their judgment as Isaacs, but they have been willing to concede that the play may not work as well on the philosophical level as it does on the dramatic one. What Isaacs found problematic and branded as "hokum," more recent critics have accepted as entertainment. One critic who was able to view the play at a distance of more than twenty years was Joseph Wood Krutch, who singled it out in his 1957 book, *The American Dream since 1918: An Informal History.* After noting Sherwood's serious intent in writing the play, Krutch explained that the author's sincerity was irrelevant in this case, because Sherwood was such a gifted craftsman that he could make the play work anyway: "*The Petrified Forest* could succeed on its superficial merits alone," Krutch writes, "and one has some difficulty in deciding whether or not one has been charmed into granting it virtues deeper than any it really has." Because philosophical issues have changed over time and the question of meaning and meaninglessness is not the pressing social concern that it was in the first half of the last century, recent appraisals of the play tend to focus away from its worldview and, like Krutch, to appreciate Sherwood's control of language and situation. Some critics still

feel that the situation is too contrived to make *The Petrified Forest* the serious drama that it presents itself to be.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #1

Kelly is an instructor of creative writing and literature at Oakton Community College. In this essay, Kelly examines the ways in which Sherwood's play can be categorized as a comedy.

Robert E. Sherwood's 1935 play *The Petrified Forest*, delves into deep topics concerning love and existence, and it ends with one man shooting another in cold blood—but at its core it is a comedy. This might seem an odd idea to audiences who find few outright laughs in the play. A better way to judge it overall, though, might be for audiences to ask what effect the play has had on them when it is done. Most viewers would probably find that they are sorrier for hopeless intellectual Alan Squier's loss of ideas than they are for his actual death, and that gangster Duke Mantee being "doomed," as Sherwood describes him in a stage direction, is not really such a bad thing at all. The basic distinction between tragedy and comedy, as defined by the Greek philosopher Aristotle, is that in tragedy everything turns out badly, regardless of who is good and who has good intentions, whereas in comedy things turn out well. A further distinction, which derives from the first, holds that tragic characters are the ones audiences come to care deeply about and empathize with, whereas comic characters are held at an objective distance, where their successes and failures can be observed as part of one grand and generally benevolent scheme.

The characters in *The Petrified Forest* are passionate, sometimes; they have personality traits that most people can relate to, even when those traits are submerged in broadly painted caricatures. What happens to them, even the lead characters, is less compelling to audiences than the ways in which they interact. They operate like cardboard cutouts that are posed in interesting positions, which is not at all unusual for comedy. The play is enjoyable, and it is thought-provoking in a large, abstract sense, but Sherwood is only able to achieve its many virtues by rendering all of the characters as types.

The most obvious of these is, of course, Gramp Maple, the grizzled old-timer who wanders around the stage looking for someone willing to listen to his stories about how life used to be, when his life was vibrant and what he did and said actually mattered. His is a character type that appears in all cultures, a reminder of how times change. Sherwood makes Gramp interesting by making his values the opposite of what audiences would expect. Normally, the "cranky old man" figure will have conservative values, because he feels that the old order that he's been comfortable with is being overrun by lawless criminal attitudes. Gramp, on the other hand, is sick of order. He misses the challenges of the uncivilized frontier. But turning the stereotype around by having Gramp cheer the troublemakers does not make him less of a stereotype; he's just doing the unexpected: surprising the audience in the way that good comedy often does.

Gramp is given his nemesis in his son, Jason, who is pompous, arrogant, and devoted to the social order in an almost maniacal way. Jason, too, is a character type. Early in

the play, he is rankled by the Communist lineman. Rather than revealing any further dimensions to his character as the play progresses, Sherwood proceeds to magnify this one trait of gung-ho patriotism by putting Jason in a ridiculous uniform and having him grab a gun that he is obviously (compared to the play's gangsters) unqualified to use. His foolish nature holds true to form when the posse he has joined to capture the Mantee gang is itself captured and immediately disarmed.

Boze Hertzlinger, whom Alan Squier sarcastically refers to by his jersey number when he calls him "Number 42 out there," never really rises above the stereotype of the washed-up athlete. Sherwood does try, in the second act, to add depth to Boze by having him swear true love to Gabby, but this has little effect on her or, therefore, to the audience. Boze's most notable action is in making a grab for a shotgun and turning it on the notorious killers, but this does not really say anything about him that was not already present from the beginning. Sherwood does say in the stage notes that Boze's voice is "strained" when announcing that he is not afraid to die, indicating that he actually is, but this does not mean that he is a coward, and since he is not an established coward, his courageous act does not represent the turning point that it seems meant to be. Boze starts out as a self-deluded braggart, and his claim of love and his leap for the gun do nothing to contradict that.

Any consideration of the comic elements of *The Petrified Forest* would be incomplete without mentioning the Chisolms. Mr. Chisolm is the kind of character who would have delighted depression audiences: though he is rich, he is not necessarily better than anyone and generally is, in fact, quite worse. His wealth is of no use to him at the Black Mesa Bar-B-Q. He is foolish enough to try to bargain with a tough guy like Duke Mantee. Like a character from Aesop's Fables, he tries to be thrifty and ends up losing all of his money. His wife openly despises him and mocks his sexual virility in public. Chisolm's final instructions to his wife are played as pure, unabashed comedy. The comic set-up—"[i]f I'm killed and you're not"—leads audiences to expect some emotional dimension that Chisolm has not shown so far, some tenderness even after she has humiliated him. The comic payoff is that she should "notify Jack Lavery. He has full instructions," showing him to be a heartless bureaucrat to the end.

Secondary characters can be comic figures without the play itself being a comedy. The focus of the play is, after all, on Alan Squier, Gabby Maple, and Duke Mantee. These characters have more problems, more issues to discuss, and they provide more for the audience to empathize with. They certainly do not seem at first to exist in a comedy. There is a difference, though, between involving the audience with the character's issues and involving them with the actual character. Even these lead characters, whose ideas are explored in detail, end up functioning more as symbols of people than as convincing, rounded characters.

In the case of Duke Mantee, much of the play's emotional distance is probably intentional. He is a media-star gangster, his viciousness hyped in newspapers and on the radio and by his henchman Jackie, who precedes Duke into the restaurant announcing, "This is Duke Mantee, folks. He's the world-famous killer and he's hungry." In person, though, Mantee does not act like the heartless animal that others say he is.

When Boze threatens to shoot him, he stops him by just injuring him slightly, only as necessary—hardly the sort of thing a soulless killer would do to keep his hostages in line. The fact that he changes positions late in the play and decides that Gramp should not have any liquor, because "[t]he girl says he oughtn't to have it," implies a growing concern for the old man's health. And his insistence on waiting for Doris shows him to be, at least in part, as much of a fool for romance as anyone. The structure of the script requires that audiences believe there is at least a slight possibility that Mantee will not shoot Alan Squier in the end, and so these humane touches are necessary for story construction. His contradictory actions do not really make him a complex character, though. A case could be made that Mantee finds himself going soft as he bonds with the people in the diner and that he shoots Alan to reaffirm to himself that he will not let sentiment pull him down, but that does not explain why he would let Boze off so lightly. He shoots Squier to assert his animal nature over Squier's intellectualism. This much is clear on the abstract level, but it does not fit with his actions. His personality quirks are understandable for symbolic purposes, but they are too far removed from real human behavior to consider this a tragic drama.

Alan Squier seems to be the play's focal character, the one that audiences are supposed to relate to, but under scrutiny he proves himself to be little more than a big, walking allegory. He has allegedly come across the desert without a penny on him, forging ahead, even though life has no meaning for him. The reason life has no meaning appears to be that he has read much but could not write his second novel. Still, he retains a poetic appreciation for metaphor. He lights up at the appropriateness of the Petrified Forest as symbolic of all of society's ills, and when he starts to admit to finding meaning in his life, he expresses it just as poetically: "I've found what I was looking for here in the Valley of the Shadow." It is easier to understand Squier's concerns in theory than it is to understand him. Squier himself would be the first to admit that his death is a symbolic end to a symbolic life. It is not comic in a "funny" sense but comic in that audiences feel comfortable with seeing him go.

At the end of the play, Gabby remains. She grieves for Squier, the man that she fell deeply in love with hours ago, during their first conversation. What has she lost? The company of the man who engaged her in intellectual conversation and clever talk, trying to convince her that intellectuality and cleverness are worthless. What has she gained? Five thousand dollars in insurance money. She starts out the play with romantic dreams of Villon's France and ends it reading Villon over that most romantic image of all, a lover who died young. With all of the gunplay and shouting, not much changes for Gabby throughout the course of the play except that she finds herself rich enough to leave Arizona.

The Petrified Forest is a comedy with more frights than laughs. It presents itself as an exploration of modern ideas, but, in the process of putting those ideas into the mouths of characters, Sherwood has turned them into self-fulfilling prophecies. Duke Mantee is a murderer with some kind traits, but basically he is the murderer that everyone says he is. Alan Squier shows up at the Black Mesa thinking that ideas are irrelevant and that he is obsolete, and in the end he dies, and none of the survivors seems to have registered a word that he said (a fate that he seems to wish upon himself by prompting Gabby with

the Villon poem she reads at the end, as if he is pushing her back to the emotional place she was when he arrived). Gabby Maple dreams of France in the beginning, and at the end she has her opportunity to go there. As Alan tells her, after he has arranged his own death, "Maybe we will be happy together in a funny kind of way."

Source: David Kelly, Critical Essay on *The Petrified Forest,* in *Drama for Students,* The Gale Group, 2003.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay excerpt, Krutch explores the two levels on which The Petrified Forest *works—a familiar, popular level and one of a deeper symbolism.*

Reunion in Vienna may not be intrinsically very important or even, in view of its close approach to the spirit of mid-European comedy, very original. With some show of reason one might, however, hail it as marking an epoch in the history of one of those minor folk ambitions which are seldom recorded even in histories of culture. From their earliest days the Washington Square Players were wistfully anxious to be, among other things, "continental," and the American intellectual often exiled himself in Europe for no better reason than that American authors were incapable of treating a chronicle of light love lightly. Here at last Mr. Sherwood had succeeded completely where others had failed; he was as "continental" as though he had been born in Budapest. One more of the reproaches traditionally leveled against American culture had been triumphantly answered. The works of Mr. Molnar need make us feel inferior no longer.

Possibly Mr. Sherwood himself decided that, having demonstrated his talents in this direction once, it was not necessary to demonstrate them again. In any event he soon proved that he could invent for himself a form as thoroughly American as it was novel, and he produced with great success two plays of which the second at least may perhaps best be described as a didactic vaudeville—a melodramatic farce-with-a-moral in which the author manages to discuss a current problem while maintaining all the superficial excitement, all the bustle and all the raffish humor, of *Broadway*. Mr. Sherwood is an intellectual by education as well as by temperament, but he has demonstrated that by taking thought he can beat more naïve dramatists at their own game.

Of the two plays, the one which it is most easy to take with complete seriousness is *The Petrified Forest* (1935), which came first. Its brilliant and instantaneous success need surprise no one. Writing so suave and acting so ingratiating would have been enough to insure the popularity of a play far less interesting in itself, and even now, indeed, they make it difficult to be sure just how substantially good it really is. Mr. Sherwood had something to say and he was obviously in earnest. He was also, however, too accomplished a craftsman to ask indulgence from any Broadway audience, since he knows the tricks of his trade and has a witty fluency quite sufficient to make something out of nothing. He could fool us to the top of our bent if that was what he wanted to do, and we may take it for granted that at least half of his delighted audience would have liked the play for reasons which have little to do with its theme. *The Petrified Forest* could succeed upon its superficial merits alone, and one has some difficulty in deciding whether or not one has been charmed into granting it virtues deeper than any it really has.

To begin with, the play is quite capable of standing on its feet as a simple comedy melodrama of a familiar type. The lonely filling station on the edge of the desert has been used before, and so has the band of fleeing desperadoes which descends upon it

to take charge temporarily of the assorted persons who happen to find themselves there. In itself all this is merely sure-fire theatrical material, and so is the fresh and innocent rebelliousness of the budding young girl, who happens in this case to be the proprietor's daughter. Add, for love interest, a penniless young man who has made a failure at writing, and there is still little to distinguish the play from very ordinary stage fare. Imagine further that the dialogue is bright and the characterization crisply realistic. You have now a play admirably calculated to please anyone intelligent enough to prefer that even the routine should be well performed. What is more, this routine play can easily be detached from all the meanings which Mr. Sherwood has given it. It is complete in itself and it is, as I remarked before, quite capable of standing alone.

Yet for all this, it is plain enough that the play is double and that the familiar situations may be taken, not at their face value, but as symbols. Solidly realistic as the filling station is, it is obviously intended also as a place out of space and time where certain men can meet and realize that they are not only individuals but phenomena as well. Though there is no obvious patterning, no hint of plain allegory even for an instant, the characters represent the protagonists in what the author conceives to be the Armageddon of society. The young man is that civilized and sophisticated intelligence which has come to the end of its tether; the young girl is aspiration toward that very sensitivity and that very kind of experience which he has not ceased to admire but which have left him bankrupt at last. About them are the forces with which they realize they cannot grapple: raucous bluster in the commander of the American Legion, dead wealth in the touring banker, primitive anarchy resurgent in the killer and his gang. By whatever grotesque name the filling station may call itself, and no matter how realistic the hamburger being served across its lunch counter as "today's special" may be, the desert tavern is also Heartbreak House, a disintegrating microcosm from which the macrocosm may be deduced. And the moral—or at least the only one which the only fully articulate person in the play can deduce—is a gloomy one. What Mr. Sherwood calls Nature, and what a poet once called Old Chaos, is coming again. We thought that she was beaten. We had learned her laws and we seemed to manipulate her according to our will. But she is bound to have her way again. She cannot get at us with floods and pestilence because we are too clever for that. But she has got us through the mind and the spirit. Intelligence can no longer believe in anything, not even in itself. It can only stand idly by with refinement and gallantry and perception while the world is taken over by the apes once more. And so when the bullets of the posse begin to shatter the windows, the young man and the young woman drop to the floor in each other's arms. It is a symbol of all they know or can still believe in, but they have no illusion that it is enough.

When Cervantes had finished the first part of *Don Quixote,* he was visited, so he says, by a friend to whom he confessed his inability to describe in any Introduction what his aim in the book might be; and upon this the friend replied that he should not worry about either explanations or meanings. "Strive," said he, "that the simple shall not be wearied and the great shall not disprove it." One can hardly deny that the method worked in that particular instance, and it works again in the case of Mr. Sherwood's play. I have, to be sure, a lingering feeling that there are dangers inherent in the effort to write on two levels at once, and some scruples about accepting as symbols things as familiar in their

literal use as some which *The Petrified Forest* employs. There is an un-resolvable ambiguity at times, not only concerning the meaning but also concerning the emotional tone, and the melodrama as such sometimes gets in the way of the intellectual significance. But such objections are purely intellectual. Mr. Sherwood achieved the almost impossible feat of writing a play which is first-rate theatrical entertainment and as much more than that as one cares to make it.

Source: Joseph Wood Krutch, "Comedy," in *The American Drama since 1918,* George Braziller, Inc., 1957, pp. 134-225.

Adaptations

The Petrified Forest was adapted as a film starring Leslie Howard and Humphrey Bogart (who were in the original Broadway production) and Bette Davis. Directed by Archie Mayo and produced by Warner Brothers in 1936, it is available on VHS from Turner Home Video.

The play was also filmed as part of the *Producers' Showcase* series and broadcast on NBC television on May 30, 1955. This version, starring Humphrey Bogart, Henry Fonda, Lauren Bacall, and Jack Klugman, is available on VHS from Video Yesteryear.

Topics for Further Study

Research the famed arts and literature scene of Paris in the 1920s, and explain why so many Americans were drawn to become part of that lifestyle.

Compare the sort of publicity that Billy the Kid received in his lifetime to the things that were written about a famous 1930s gangster like John Dillinger or Baby Face Nelson when they were alive. Did public attitudes change? If so, why?

Watch a few gangster films from the twenties and thirties. In what ways is Duke Mantee a typical criminal figure from that time? In what ways is he unique?

Robert E. Sherwood is known for the antiwar themes of his plays. Try to identify subtle ways in which *The Petrified Forest* can be seen as a statement against war.

Boze is a former football star who has become a gas station attendant. Find someone who used to play football, and interview him about why he quit playing and how he feels about the game now.

Write a short three-person play describing the conversation in the Chisolms' car on the drive back to Ohio.

Compare and Contrast

1930s: America is in the middle of the Great Depression. Small businesses like the one in the play have a difficult time avoiding bankruptcy.

Today: Independent gas stations and restaurants are increasingly rare, as both industries are dominated by franchise businesses.

1930s: America has a fascination with the exploits of gangsters such as John Dillinger, Pretty Boy Floyd, Bonnie and Clyde, and Baby Face Nelson.

Today: A whole category of rap music is dedicated to the exploits of "gangstas."

1930s: A young woman living in the Arizona desert could only dream of what France was like.

Today: Any person with an internet connection can find endless information about daily life in France from the World Wide Web.

1930s: Because of laws and traditions that require races to remain separated, law-abiding blacks are likely to participate in society as paid servants, such as cooks, butlers, and cleaning persons.

Today: Equal job opportunity has been required by federal law since the 1960s, and as a result no occupations are expected to be staffed solely by any one race.

1930s: The Painted Desert and Petrified Forest area of Arizona is a popular vacation stop.

Today: Entertainment spots such as Disney World and Las Vegas are more popular than are natural formations as vacation destinations.

1930s: Audiences are shocked to hear the kind of language that Gabby uses in the play, considering it improper for a lady.

Today: Gabby's language is so mild by today's standards that it would hardly be noticed.

1930s: Workers in the United States who are distressed about the nation's social inequality might have a casual discussion about the benefits of Communism over lunch in a diner.

Today: During the cold war (1945-1990), most Americans considered Communism a threat. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, most Americans dismiss it as a failure.

What Do I Read Next?

Sherwood followed *The Petrified Forest* with *Idiot's Delight,* the first of his three Pulitzer Prize-winning plays. Published in 1936, it concerns a group of European travelers who are trapped in a hotel, coming to grips with their beliefs as World War II begins. In reality, the war began years after the play was written.

Of all of the famous criminals of the early thirties, the one Duke Mantee seems most closely patterned after is Charles "Pretty Boy" Floyd, who was accused of murdering federal agents in helping a prisoner to escape in an event called the "Kansas City Massacre" (like the "Oklahoma City Massacre" reported in the play). The facts of Floyd's life and mystique are examined in Michael Wallis's *Pretty Boy: The Life and Times of Charles Arthur Floyd* (1992).

Edward Anderson's novel *Thieves Like Us* (1935) was a groundbreaking work about bank robbers trying to stay one step ahead of the law in the Southwest. It is currently out of print but is available in its entirety in the Library of America's *Crime Novels: American Noir of the 1930s and 40s,* edited by Horace McCoy.

In the second act, Alan Squier compares the situation in the diner to the situation in *All Quiet on the Western Front,* the 1930 war novel by German writer Erich Maria Remarque that was obviously a source of inspiration for Sherwood.

Gabby Maple's enthusiasm for French art is fueled by the poetry of the fifteenth-century writer François Villon. *François Villon: Complete Poems* is available in a 1994 edition by University of Toronto Press, edited with English translation and commentary by Barbara N. Sargent Baur.

As opposed to Gabby's romantic view, Alan Squier expresses his own nihilism by referring to T. S. Eliot's 1925 poem, "The Hollow Men," considered one of the basic texts in modernist thought.

One of the best sources to tell modern readers what life was like when this novel takes place is Studs Terkel's *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression* (1970). Terkel recorded his interviews with ordinary people who talked about their lives and how they viewed the events of the time.

Sherwood was one of the most famous literary figures around New York in the 1920s and 1930s. James R. Gaines's *Wit's End: Days and Nights of the Algonquin Round Table* is an informative and witty account of the famed social group that Sherwood belonged to with a group of other writers and actors known for their lively and witty conversation. It was published in 1977 by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Further Study

Auchincloss, Louis, "Robert E. Sherwood," in *The Man behind the Book: Literary Profiles,* Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996, pp. 192-98.

Written by one of the most famed biographers of the mid-twentieth century, this brief but telling profile of the playwright does not have much detail about Sherwood's life but is told by an intelligent observer.

Brown, John Mason, *The Worlds of Robert E. Sherwood: Mirror to His Times, 1896-1939,* Harper & Row, 1962.

Brown's book is considered to be the definitive biography of Sherwood, following his life up to the start of World War II and offering insight into how the playwright's ideas formed. He also wrote *The Ordeal of a Playwright: Robert E. Sherwood and the Challenge of War,* published by Harper & Row in 1970.

Meserve, Walter J., *Robert E. Sherwood: Reluctant Moralist,* Pegasus, 1970.

Meserve examines Sherwood's career in terms of his Christian social ideals.

Wiser, William, *The Twilight Years: Paris in the 1930s,* Carroll & Graff, 2000.

Wiser's follow-up book to *The Crazy Years: Paris in the Twenties* does what the play does: it links the artistic freedom that Paris was famous for to the harsh realities that lay ahead with the coming of World War II.

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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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