The Philadelphia Story Study Guide

The Philadelphia Story by Philip Barry

BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Philip Barry was one of the more popular and successful American playwrights of the 1920s and 1930s. He wrote more than twenty plays, but is best remembered for *The Philadelphia Story*, a comedy of manners set in Philadelphia high society during the late 1930s.

Tracy Lord, the wealthy heroine of *The Philadelphia Story*, divorces her husband, C.K. Dexter Haven, and is about to marry a man named George Kittredge. However, their wedding preparations are interrupted by meddlesome reporters, her ex-husband, and her estranged father; she is also disconcerted by the growing realization that she still has feelings for her ex-husband, Dexter. Amidst the situation comedy and fast-paced dialogue, Barry explores several contemporary social issues, such as society's perception of class differences in America and contemporary attitudes towards adultery and divorce.

The play was enthusiastically reviewed by critics and enjoyed a successful Broadway run for over a year. During that period, more people saw *The Philadelphia Story* than had seen all of Barry's other plays combined. In fact, the success of the play effectively rescued the troubled Shubert Theater in New York (otherwise known as the Theater Guild) from bankruptcy. Barry had written the role especially for the actress Katherine Hepburn, and the play's success simultaneously launched Hepburn's career on the stage and film.

The Philadelphia Story has remained a popular staple of regional theater companies since its debut. Although social attitudes towards adultery and divorce have changed, the play endures because of its compelling characterization of Tracy Lord, a young woman whose self-discoveries still speak to younger generations of theatergoers and movie fans.

Author Biography

Philip Barry was born on June 18, 1896, in Rochester, New York, to a wealthy Irish-Catholic family. He was educated in both Roman Catholic and secular schools before attending Yale University in 1913. Rejected for military service during the World War I, Barry worked for the U.S. Department of State at home and abroad during 1918-1919.

He returned to Yale in 1919 for his senior year, and became involved in the Dramatic Club. He contributed short stories and poetry to the *Yale Literary Magazine* and the college newspaper; later, he wrote a one-act play for the Dramatic Club.

After graduating from Yale he attended George Pierce Baker's famous 47 Workshop at Harvard University. The 47 Workshop was a course in playwrighting and producing that taught several renowned writers.

Barry spent the early years of the 1920s working for an advertising firm. When his third play, *The Jilts*, was produced on Broadway as *You and I* (1923), he quit his job and became a full-time playwright. *You and I* depicted a young man's decision to forsake security for the stage, and it became an immense success. He divided his time between New York and Cannes, although America remained the setting of most of his dramas and comedies.

Barry was a prolific writer: he wrote nineteen major plays and a novel. He wanted to be recognized for his serious dramas as well as his comedies, but his dramas were invariably commercial flops; although critics have subsequently pointed to his innovative and early use of psychoanalysis on the stage, his dramatic works remain unappreciated to this day.

Consequently, Barry's reputation primarily rests on his three most successful comedies, *Holiday* (1928), *Paris Bound* (1927), and *The Philadelphia Story* (1939). These three plays are set in upperclass New England, and all of them concern marriage and status in contemporary America. In *Holiday*, the happy-go-lucky protagonist is engaged to a wealthy woman; she and her family want to squeeze him into the family firm, but he resists, and eventually abandons her to pursue his dreams.

In *Paris Bound*, a young, rich, newly married couple embrace liberal ideas about a free marriage, but find their bohemian attitudes are soon challenged. In *The Philadelphia Story*, a young heiress discards one husband and chooses another she believes is more suitable, only to discover that her first husband is in fact the right man for her.

Barry died at age fifty-five from a heart attack. His reputation as a fine writer of American comedy remains solid, and has been bolstered by the continuing popularity of both the stage and film versions of his best play, *The Philadelphia Story*.

Plot Summary

Act I

The play opens with an intimate family scene between the long-suffering Margaret Lord and her two daughters, Tracy and Dinah. The three women are busy planning Tracy's wedding to George Kittredge. She is marrying in style, with a pre-nuptial party and a stylish reception for five hundred people.

When Tracy briefly exits, Dinah tells her mother that Dexter is in town. Dinah is clearly fond of Dexter, and seems to regret her sister's divorce. Later in the scene, Dinah telephones Dexter and issues him an invitation to the festivities.

Tracy's impending marriage and her past alliance are discussed in light of the failed marriage of her parents. Tracy despises her father for his poor treatment of her mother, but her mother tends to blame herself. Their disagreement seems to parallel Tracy's attitude towards her own failed first marriage. Was her first husband, Dexter, at fault? Or was she? Should she be more forgiving, like her mother? Tracy dismisses the idea of shared blame, commenting that she and her mother "just picked the wrong first husbands."

Tracy exits. Dinah has been proofreading; she now reveals that the proof sheets are a magazine story about her father's adultery. Dinah innocently believes the story is false; Margaret inadvertently reveals that the story is true.

Sandy, Tracy's elder brother, arrives. He works as an editor at *The Saturday Evening Post*. Margaret asks him whether the story can be stopped. Tracy learns about the story. Sandy announces that he has "fixed" the problem: instead of printing the story, the magazine will instead cover Tracy's wedding. Tracy is furious with this "trade" to "save" her "Father's face," pointing out that he doesn't deserve it. Yet she agrees to cooperate.

Tracy realizes that the reporters will suspect something is suspicious when her father is not present for the wedding. (Tracy has refused to invite him.) Sandy responds by saying that he already thought of this possibility and arranged a telegram announcing that their father cannot attend the wedding due to illness. This is not good enough for Tracy: she decides to pretend that her Uncle Willie is her father and that her family is a bunch of pretentious snobs.

Liz Imbrie and Mike Connor arrive to write the story. Dinah greets them, speaking in French and singing ditties. Mike concludes that she is "an idiot ... They happen in the best of families, especially the best."

Tracy enters and dismisses her sister, then proceeds to play out the even more ridiculous part of charming, flattering hostess. When Mike says, "I'm 'Mike' to my friends," Tracy replies, all sweetness and light, "Of whom you have many, I'm sure." Her interrogative manner takes Liz and Mike by surprise.

Tracy reenters with Kittredge and introduces him. Uncle Willie arrives, and Tracy pretends he is her "Papa!" Unexpectedly, Dexter arrives. The charade is further complicated when Tracy's real father, Seth, arrives. She promptly pretends that he is Uncle Willie.

Act II

As Act II opens, Mike and Liz provide another perspective on Lord family history. After Liz leaves with Uncle Willie, Tracy enters and strikes up a conversation with Mike. She has read Mike's books and enjoyed them, and they soon realize they understand each other in unexpected ways.

When Mike explains that he is a reporter in order to support his career as a writer, Tracy generously offers him the use of her country cottage, but he ungraciously refuses. "Well, you see er you see the idea of artists having a patron has more or less gone out [of fashion]."

Suddenly, Dexter appears. The atmosphere becomes tense as Dexter jokes about his poor treatment of Tracy in the past and then criticizes Tracy in front of Mike. He accuses her of being insensitive to his alcoholism and impatient with "any kind of human imperfection."

Obviously uncomfortable, Mike exits. Continuing his conversation with Tracy, Dexter criticizes Kittredge, arguing that "he's just not for you."

Kittredge enters and Dexter leaves. Their conversation makes it clear that many of Dexter's statements are true. Kittredge views Tracy as "marvelous, distant... cool" and feels she possesses "a kind of beautiful purity." He wants "to build" her "an ivory tower with my own two hands."

It seems that Kittredge may indeed not be the right man for Tracy, who wants to be "really loved," not "worshipped." This is even more apparent when Kittredge voices his approval for the *Destiny* magazine article.

Kittredge exits, and Margaret and Seth enter. Tracy confronts her father about his infidelity. Her mother insists that the only person it concerns is Seth, who then responds, "That's very wise of you, Margaret. What most wives won't seem to realize is that their husband's philandering particularly the middle-aged kind has nothing to do with them."

Incredulous, Tracy questions her father's statement. Seth replies that he was reluctant to "grow old" and wishes he had "the right kind of daughter ... One who loves him blindly." Without such a daughter, he claims, "he's inclined to go in search of it..." In short, he blames her for his affair.

Liz and Mike try to reveal that they are in fact from *Destiny* magazine. Their attempt is foiled by the arrival of the telegram announcing Seth's sickness. The subsequent confusion makes clear to Mike and Liz that the Lords have been duplicitous.

Uncle Willie and Seth resume their correct identities, and the entire group leaves for the pre-nuptial party. As they exit, however, Tracy gulps down a glass of champagne, and pours herself another.

Act II Scene II takes place in the early hours of the morning after the pre-nuptial party. Sandy and Tracy, both drunk, scheme to write an expose of *Destiny's* publisher, Sidney Kidd, in order to blackmail him into stopping the story about the wedding.

During the course of their conversation it becomes clear that Tracy is very drunk and that she has already spent two hours alone with Mike that evening. Mike, who imagines himself in love with Tracy, then enters, and Sandy exits to write the article on Kidd.

Tracy and Mike flirt. Mike delights Tracy by proclaiming that he sees her as "made of flesh and blood ... full of love and warmth." She is pleased and relieved that a man finally sees her as warmly human rather than as a remote goddess. They kiss, then run off to the swimming pool for a naked dip.

Sandy and Liz enter. Sandy has already guessed that Liz is in love with Mike, and asks her why she doesn't marry him. Liz replies that "he's still got a lot to learn, and I don't want to get in his way yet." Liz leaves, and Dexter enters.

Sandy hints that there may be "complications" to the wedding. Kittredge enters and Dexter hints that Tracy and Mike may be interested in each other. Mike enters, with Tracy in his arms. Kittredge is horrified to realize that "she she hasn't any clothes on!" Mike carries her up to bed then returns. Dexter knocks him down before Kittredge can.

Act III

Uncle Willie and Dinah misinterpret Mike's presence in Tracy's bedroom. At first, she does not remember her escapades, but starts to recall her behavior. Tracy, forced to realize that she has "feet of clay," apologizes to her father for her unforgiving attitude.

Mike enters and Tracy explains that she is not interested in him. She mistakenly believes that they have slept together. Tracy confesses her misbehavior to her ex-husband. He reveals that Kittredge left a note for her; Tracy is relieved to find out that he has broken off the wedding.

Kittredge appears and says that he will go ahead with the marriage if she can offer him an explanation. Tracy refuses and contemptuously dismisses him. However, a wedding does go ahead: the play ends with Tracy, who finally feels "like a human being," remarrying Dexter.

Act 1 Part 1

Act 1 Part 1 Summary

In the Lord family sitting room, Tracy sits writing thank-you notes for wedding presents as her younger sister Dinah reads proofs from a magazine article that she found in their her brother Sandy's room. As their mother Margaret brings in more presents, Dinah complains that the article "stinks," and Margaret tells her to speak more politely. As Margaret and Tracy try to identify what one of the gifts actually is, Dinah refers to a gift from a relative none of them likes, and wonders what he sent "the other time." Tracy comments that no one important sent anything the other time, adding that eloping to Maryland like she and her first husband did can't really be considered a wedding. Dinah announces that Dexter, Tracy's first husband, is back in town. Margaret asks how she knows, and Dinah tells her she saw his car when she was taking the dog for a walk. Tracy tells Margaret not to worry, that she's not afraid at all of Dexter, saying that the only trouble he gave her was when he married her. She says that the same thing might be said of her father, Seth, but Margaret cuts her off and says she won't hear a word against him. Margaret goes on to comment that neither of them has been much of a success as a wife, but Tracy says that they just picked the wrong first husbands. She adds that she's sure she's going to be happy this time. Margaret thinks Tracy will be happy as well, but Dinah says she prefers Dexter. Tracy goes out, sarcastically suggesting that she invite Dexter to lunch.

Dinah and Margaret discuss how Tracy and Dexter broke up, and Dinah asks whether it's true that Dexter hit her. Margaret says she doesn't know the details. Dinah says she read stories in magazines about them and that it must be awful for people to read stories like that about themselves. She adds that the family's going to be upset when they read the stories about Seth that are about to be published. When Margaret asks what she's talking about, Dinah tells her that the article she was reading contains information about Seth, his history and his relationship with a popular dancer in New York. As Margaret reads the article, Dinah asks why Tracy didn't invite Seth to the wedding. Margaret explains that Tracy has very high standards for how people should behave, and sometimes people just don't live up to them. She goes out, and Dinah takes the opportunity of being alone to call Dexter and tell him that Tracy's invited him to lunch.

Act 1 Part 1 Analysis

Several important story and thematic elements are introduced in this scene. Tracy's first marriage, her father's history and the family's relationship with the press all play key roles in the plot. At this point, they're not only providing exposition, but they're also foreshadowing conflict to come.

The discussion of Tracy's high standards offers a key insight into her character and establishes the point at which she starts her personal journey of transformation from being close-minded and judgmental to being more open-minded, open-hearted and compassionate. This journey dramatizes the play's theme, that holding too closely to high standards can lead to missing out on genuine human connection and relationship.

The dialogue in this play is carefully constructed, with the Lords in particular speaking in a self-consciously witty and well-mannered fashion. This is a manifestation of how they're concerned with appearances, doing and saying things in just the right way to be perceived as simultaneously clever and proper. Other characters, in particular George, Mike and Liz, are just as clever, but they have a more casual way of expressing their cleverness. This mode of speech clearly contrasts with the privileged classes, as Mike calls them, among whom are the Lords, whose name perhaps is symbolic of their attitude towards those of the working class, like George, Mike and Liz.

Act 1 Part 2

Act 1 Part 2 Summary

Tracy comes back in and asks Dinah to help her with the seating arrangement for the wedding dinner. As they work, Sandy comes in, followed soon afterwards by Margaret. They all make small talk about Sandy's wife and child and his wedding present. Sandy asks where George is, and after Tracy tells him George is staying in the guest cottage, Sandy refers to a magazine article about how George worked his way up from being a miner to running the mine. Margaret asks Sandy about the magazine article about Seth, saying that she doesn't want Seth to hear about it and become upset. Sandy tells her that he's already sent Seth a copy, and Tracy says she's glad he'll be upset.

Just as Margaret's asking why Sandy sent Seth the article, a servant comes in, saying that Sandy's guests are upstairs and will be down shortly. Tracy angrily asks what guests. Sandy tells her their names, Macaulay Connor (Mike) and Liz Imbrie. Tracy recognizes them as a writer and photographer working for the magazine that's going to publish the article on Seth. She calls the library and asks for Mike's books to be sent up to her. Sandy explains that he has made a deal with the magazine's publisher, Sidney Kidd, to not publish the article about Seth in exchange for letting Mike and Liz do a feature on Tracy's wedding. He concludes by saying that Kidd has agreed, and the article on Seth won't be published. Tracy and Margaret both react angrily, and Tracy resolves to give them a picture of family life they'll never forget. Margaret asks whether Mike and Liz know that the family knows why they're there. Sandy says they don't. Dinah comments that it'll seem strange to them that Seth hasn't been invited to his daughter's wedding, but Sandy says he has made arrangements for a fake telegram to be sent explaining Seth's absence.

Just as Tracy is going out to change, Uncle Willie arrives. His wife has sent him out of the house so that she can get ready for the pre-wedding dinner party she's having that night. A brief discussion about whether Kidd might be sued for libel is interrupted when Uncle Willie sees two strangers coming. Tracy, Dinah and Margaret all run out, taking Uncle Willie with them and leaving Sandy to greet Connor and Liz on his own.

Act 1 Part 2 Analysis

An important aspect of the play's plot comes into play in this section as the Lords, especially Tracy, begin to go to extreme lengths to try to preserve their reputation. This is also an aspect of the play's theme, in that maintaining what they think are high standards of propriety leads to a lot of complication. In other words, life would have been much simpler if they had confronted the situation honestly instead of trying to convince people how upright they are.

The plan to maintain the family's reputation becomes more complicated and more difficult to sustain as the play continues. The style of the action comes close to that of farce, a type of comedy in which people act in extreme ways in order to conceal a truth that's not nearly as damaging as they think it is. This is an example of the way that style informs substance and vice versa, in that an important part of Tracy's journey of transformation is discovering that facing the truth is more rewarding than the struggle to hide it. Not only does she discover this as she struggles to maintain her reputation, but she also discovers it through her relationship with Macaulay Connor and Liz Imbrie, whom the play is about to introduce.

Act 1 Part 3

Act 1 Part 3 Summary

As Mike and Liz come in, they comment on all the rooms they had to go through to get to this one. Sandy greets them, commenting on Mike's hostile attitude and saying that once he gets to know the family he might actually find out they're decent people. Mike says that he opposes everything the Lords stand for. As Liz looks at wedding presents and comments ironically on the conversation, Mike asks whether the story of George's journey from being a miner to a manager is true. He also asks how George and Tracy met and about George's family background. As Sandy is leaving for the library so he can get a copy of George's family tree, Liz asks whether the rest of the family knows why she and Mike are there. Sandy says they don't, adding that it's much more pleasant that way.

After Sandy is gone, Liz is surprised to see a painting by a well-known artist. Meanwhile, Mike looks at the gifts and tries to imagine what someone with the name "C.K. Dexter Haven" must be like. Liz comments that the name Macaulay Connor isn't such a plain name either, but Mike says he's been Mike all his life. Liz comments that she knew a man named Joe Smith once, but Mike is still thinking about how useless someone with a name like C.K. Dexter Haven must be. Liz reassures him that people like Haven are out, and "men of the people" like George are in. They try to imagine how George and Tracy got together, and then they try to imagine Tracy. Mike refers to her as young, rich and voracious. Liz says she's frightened of Tracy already but would trade places with her in a second.

Act 1 Part 3 Analysis

Mike is a snob like Tracy, only in reverse. They both believe that there are certain ways to behave, and they both have high standards. While Tracy bases her values on appearances, Mike bases his beliefs on what he calls honesty and true feeling. Mike is of the opinion that these differences exist as a result of Tracy being rich and him being poor, and the play seems to agree with him. The bottom line, though, is that neither Mike nor Tracy seems open to perspectives other than their own. The way these two snobs challenge each other's preconceptions, and as a result discover the true value of honest human connection, dramatizes the play's central theme. They propel each other along journeys of transformation and discover that human beings are the same no matter how many silver chafing dishes or how little money they have.

Liz, like Dinah, is a clear contrast to Tracy, speaking honestly and directly if at times in a self-consciously clever way. In other ways, she is also a parallel to Tracy, as will be discussed later. In this scene, her comment about the painter foreshadows the later revelation that she herself is an artist, while her comment about Joe Smith foreshadows the stories she tells in the following scene and later in the play about their relationship.

Act 1 Part 4

Act 1 Part 4 Summary

As Mike complains that Kidd works them too hard, Dinah comes in and, using artificially formal language, introduces herself. She speaks French, plays the piano and sings. Just as Liz and Mike are commenting on how she must be the family idiot, Tracy appears in an overly feminine dress and speaking in a similarly flowery way. She sends Dinah out and invites Mike and Liz to stay for the wedding. She says that she hopes that Liz will take all the pictures since they've refused to allow any photographers. She adds that "Papa" was so angry about the way the breakup between Tracy and Dexter was written about that all reporters are barred from the house as well, adding that as soon as she heard that Mike was a real writer she ordered his books from the library. She asks whether he or Liz is married. To Mike's surprise, Liz confesses she was once married to the Joe Smith she referred to earlier and that they got a divorce. Tracy asks her whether she thinks marriage is a "gyp." Liz says firmly that it isn't, and Tracy agrees, saying that's why she's having another try at it tomorrow.

George arrives, and Tracy introduces him to Mike and Liz. George jokes about the coal dust he's shaken off himself. Tracy jokes about how well he cleans up, and Mike comments on the article that was just written about him. George says that he's already moved on from that article, and Tracy talks about how good he is at dealing with the men. They banter about whether George can personally see to it that it doesn't rain for the wedding. Just as Mike comments that this must really be love, Margaret comes in. She apologizes for being late and also apologizes for her husband's absence. He's been delayed in New York taking care of the business affairs of the popular dancer Tina Mara. As they all have pre-lunch drinks, Uncle Willie comes in. Tracy immediately refers to him as father, saying how wonderful he is to drop everything he was doing in New York and join them for lunch. Sandy and Dinah go along with the charade as Tracy ushers Margaret and Uncle Willie out, telling Margaret to explain to "Papa" the new seating arrangement for the wedding dinner.

Before Margaret and Uncle Willie can go out, Dexter arrives. Margaret tells him to go home, but Dexter says he's been invited. He greets the members of the family, saving Tracy for last. As she introduces him to Liz and Mike, she and Dexter make pointed comments about their marriage. A butler comes in to announce that lunch is ready, and everyone pairs off, with Tracy taking Mike's arm. As everyone else goes in, Mike comments that it's no wonder Tracy wants to get married and get away. Seth arrives, saying that when he got the article from Sandy he had to come down. Tracy refers to him as Uncle Willie and then tells everyone else to go in because she wants a private word with him. When they're alone, Seth comments on how he can feel Tracy's resentment, and he wonders what she's up to. She says that thanks to him, they're all in trouble.

Act 1 Part 4 Analysis

In this section of the play, the action becomes more farcical as Tracy and her family go to increasingly extreme means to manipulate Mike and Liz. To begin with, Tracy and Dinah's over-the-top behavior mocks what they believe Mike and Liz are expecting. Then, Tracy makes pointed comments about reporters and photographers, with the full knowledge of who Liz and Mike are and why they're there. She intends to make them feel, if not guilty because of their lies, at least self-conscious about them. Also, Margaret attempts to head off potential bad press by telling Liz and Mike some part of the truth. She hopes that they'll accept that that's the full story. Finally, Tracy goes to even greater lengths to keep them in the dark by introducing Uncle Willie and Seth as each other, maintaining the all-important fiction that the Lords are one big happy family.

Into all of this comes Dexter, whose bantering, flirtatious conversation immediately antagonizes both Mike and Tracy. This sets him up as clearly belonging to Tracy's world and shows him at first glance to be exactly the kind of useless rich do-nothing Mike expected him to be. The action of the play reveals that Dexter's style is simultaneously a mask he uses to cover up his real feelings and a barbed weapon he uses to poke holes in the pretensions of other people, particularly Tracy and Mike.

Act 2 Scene 1 Part 1

Act 2 Scene 1 Part 1 Summary

Out on the screened-in back porch, Liz takes photographs, and Mike makes notes. As they talk about the situation George is in now that Dexter has shown up, Mike wonders whether rich, beautiful Tracy is actually any use. Liz hints that Mike finds her attractive, but Mike denies it. Liz says she feels guilty about not telling the Lords the true reason she and Mike are there.

Uncle Willie and Seth come in, and Uncle Willie offers Liz a rose. As Liz takes their picture, Uncle Willie, who is still pretending to be Seth, suggests that he might invite his dancer friend from New York to the wedding. Seth, who is still pretending to be Uncle Willie, says it would be a good idea since it might put all the rumors to rest. Sandy comes out and tells them all it is time to dress for dinner. Seth goes out, followed by Sandy. Uncle Willie offers to show Liz a beautiful subject for a photograph, an antique stone toilet. He and Liz go out to take the picture.

As Mike is preparing to leave, Tracy comes out and asks him to stay. She says she's been reading his stories and that she can't figure him out. How can someone who talks as tough as he does write such beautiful things? She says his toughness is something he puts on to protect himself, and she begins to say she knows something about masks. Then, she stops herself. She talks for a moment about a particular story, "The Rich and Mighty." Mike says he took the title from a Spanish story about needing patience when dealing with the rich. Tracy asks how Mike can stand to do the kind of thing he does, referring to something he said after lunch about writing for magazines. Mike explains that he's got to pay the bills, adding that Liz is an extremely talented painter but has to pay her bills by taking pictures. Tracy offers him the use of her cottage in the country, but he refuses, saying the idea of artists being supported by rich people has gone out of style. Tracy says there is no need to remind her of her class's "general uselessness."

Dexter comes in carrying a small picture frame wrapped in tissue paper. After some banter about drinks, Tracy asks him to leave. Mike starts to go, but both Tracy and Dexter ask him to stay. As Tracy tries to get Dexter to explain why he's there, Dexter talks about how beautiful Tracy is. He says she'll always be beautiful because everybody takes care of her, and she has no flaws. Then, he turns the conversation around by saying she has no patience with anybody else's flaws. He refers to his drinking problem, saying that it got worse once he realized that his position in her life wasn't that of a husband but of someone who was meant to worship at the altar of Tracy's perfection. When he refers to her as a goddess, Tracy angrily protests that that isn't the way she thought of things at all. Dexter talks about the night that Tracy got drunk on champagne, climbed onto the roof and wailed at the moon. As Tracy insists that that never happened, Mike has had enough and leaves.

Dexter then says he can't understand why Tracy and George are getting married. They are too different. Tracy says she loves George, and they argue over whether love between two such different people is possible. Dexter says that it won't be possible for Tracy to love anybody until she can have some compassion for human frailty and maybe discover a frailty of her own. George appears, and Dexter goes out, saying that he left Tracy's wedding present on the table.

Act 2 Scene 1 Part 1 Analysis

Throughout this section, Mike and Tracy each face important challenges to their sense of self and their sense of each other. Mike faces his first challenge from Liz, who has intuited that in spite of his preconceptions and prejudices about Tracy, he finds her attractive. He then faces a challenge from Tracy, who by appreciating his book challenges his belief that she's shallow and, to use his own word, useless. Tracy is herself challenged by Mike, who through his book has indirectly challenged her ideas of who he is both as a person and as a member of his class. It seems, however, that she has moved further away from who she was than he has moved from who he was. This is indicated by her near-admission that she too protects herself and her open admission of her class's uselessness, both comments suggesting that her journey of transformation is well underway. Mike, however, seems to have further to go.

Tracy is further challenged by Dexter, whose pointed but wittily phrased comments about Tracy's lack of compassion go straight to the heart of the journey that she's undertaking. She needs to discover her own frailties so she can have compassion for the frailties of others. On some level, she knows he's right. He's making exactly the same point that her own behavior with Mike just illustrated, but her resentment of the way he behaved in the past and of his perceptiveness combines with the pride that Dexter is talking about to make her resist what he's saying. The exchange with George that follows, however, breaks down her resistance to Dexter and to the truth of his observations and takes her further along her journey of transformation.

Act 2 Scene 1 Part 2

Act 2 Scene 1 Part 2 Summary

Following a brief interruption from Dinah, Tracy opens the gift from Dexter. It's a photograph of a boat, the True Love, that Dexter built and that they sailed together. Tracy refers to it as "yare," a term that she explains means graceful, responsive and easy to handle. As George comments that the gift is tasteless, Tracy talks about how she wants to get away from this life and be something useful. George says that he wants to build her a beautiful house on a hill and take her away from all the people whom they don't like and who waste their time. He says that she's something beautiful and austere and perfect. Tracy listens, becoming more and more shocked, as George uses language similar to Dexter's, referring to Tracy as a goddess. He says that everybody feels that way about her. He's always worshiped her from afar and wants to keep her distant and perfect. Tracy tells him that she doesn't want to be worshiped. She wants to be loved. When George says he does love her, Tracy says he doesn't see what she means.

Servants appear to clear away glasses. A maid asks whether Tracy wants the picture put with the other presents, and Tracy tells her to leave it where it is. George talks about what an honor it is to be profiled in a magazine like the one Liz and Mike work for. Tracy can't believe what he's saying, but before they can talk any further Margaret comes in with Seth. She tells George to go in and get dressed for dinner. George runs out, and Seth comments on how he does everything as though he's on a football field. He and Margaret talk about how difficult it is to keep up the various pretenses Tracy has set up for the benefit of Mike and Liz. Tracy comments that they wouldn't have to worry about it if Seth hadn't behaved so badly with the dancer. Margaret tells her to stop, but Seth explains that he found in the dancer something that he didn't get from his daughter - gentleness, affection and an understanding heart. As Tracy reacts with shock, sputtering as she tries to get words out, understanding and forgiveness pass between Margaret and Seth.

Uncle Willie comes in and addresses Seth as Uncle Willie. Seth says from now on, all the games are over, and everybody is going to be revealed as who they really are. Sandy and Dinah come in, and amidst banter about who is going to have what drink, Tracy makes pointed comments about how goddesses don't drink at all. Mike and Liz come out, having changed into evening clothes for dinner. As champagne is poured, Mike, Liz, Seth and Uncle Willie all begin to explain the truth about why they're there. They are interrupted by the arrival of a servant with the telegram that Sandy mentioned earlier, the one excusing Seth from the festivities. As the servant goes out, Liz and Mike suddenly understand what's going on. Uncle Willie interrupts and says it's time to go over to his house for the pre-wedding dinner. Everybody except Tracy and Mike goes out.

Tracy tells Mike to go on ahead. She'll follow with George. She then asks Mike to have a little patience with her, like the "rich and mighty." He says he will and then goes out. Tracy drinks down a glass of champagne and then quickly pours herself another one.

Act 2 Scene 1 Part 2 Analysis

Tracy's perception of herself receives further severe jolts in this section of the play as George and Seth reiterate Dexter's observations. Interestingly, George finds her goddess-ness lovable, while Seth and Dexter both find it objectionable. The ultimate point is that Tracy doesn't want to be perceived as a goddess at all. She's not yet able to admit that everyone is right, but as revealed in her conversation with Mike, she is starting to become more open to what's going on inside. It's possible to see that her outside, the self-righteous goddess of high standards she presents to the world, is beginning to fall apart. There's a chance of her actually developing some of the compassion that her father and ex-husband have both been missing. Meanwhile, the brief and mostly non-verbal exchange between Seth and Margaret at the conclusion of Seth's comments about Tracy illustrates exactly what's been missing. It's clear in these few moments that Margaret and Seth, in spite of the pain they've caused each other and themselves, are nevertheless able to make room in their hearts for understanding and compassion. The contrast with Tracy couldn't be clearer, more pointed or more relevant.

The first and only important symbol in the play is the photograph of the True Love, which represents the true connection and affection that exists between Dexter and Tracy. From Dexter's conversation in the scene previous to this, it can be interpreted that he loved Tracy all along but felt that she had no love for him. She wasn't even capable of love, only resentment. The gift foreshadows her discovery of his love and of her own for him, but before she makes that discovery she has a few more steps to take on her journey of transformation, steps documented in the next few scenes of the play.

The way that everybody at last begins telling the truth about who they are and why they're there foreshadows those steps. The games Tracy has forced everybody into playing are a manifestation of her insistence on propriety, which means that the those games represents the way that the reasons for her insistence are breaking down. As this atmosphere of honesty and openness expands and everybody's identities are revealed, it becomes possible for Tracy, Mike, Liz and Dexter to reveal their deeper emotional identities, dramatizing the play's key theme as defined above.

Act 2 Scene 2 Part 1

Act 2 Scene 2 Part 1 Summary

Very early the following morning Tracy and Sandy come in, still dressed in their evening clothes from the night before. Tracy convinces Sandy to write an expose on Sidney Kidd based on what Mike told them at dinner the night before. The plan is to exchange the expose for the story on Seth and the dancer and therefore avoid scandalous publicity. Sandy says he'll go up to his room and start work right away, and he tells Tracy she'd better get to bed. She starts to pour herself some more champagne. Sandy tells her she'd better slow down, but Tracy says it never affects her. Sandy says that's because she never drinks it. They talk about how angry George was at dinner that Tracy spent so much time talking with Mike, and Tracy says it's almost as though she'd been talking with Dexter. She comments that she doesn't like talking to Dexter because of all the hurt she sees in his eyes, and she says she envies Sandy's family life. Sandy says that Mike has fallen for her, and he wonders whether Tracy has fallen for him. Tracy tells him to go write the article and then suddenly stops when she thinks she hears the telephone in her bedroom. She almost goes in and answers it, but then she sees Mike coming. She stays.

Mike comes in, quoting a sarcastic poem he's just written about Sidney Kidd and talking about how drinking champagne feels very different from drinking whisky. He suggests that Sandy write an expose on Kidd. Tracy and Sandy both think it's a good idea. Mike comments that he's seeing a mist in front of his eyes, and Tracy suggests they all go in for a swim to wake themselves up. She takes off her jewelry, ready to jump right in. Mike decides to have more champagne instead, and Tracy tells Sandy to fetch Liz.

When Sandy's gone, Mike talks about how much fun he had at dinner watching the privileged classes enjoying their privileges. Then he tells Tracy she can't marry George, saying they don't match up. Tracy says she's going to go ahead and do it and then talks about how Mike is a snob. He judges people according to his preconceptions. She says that he needs to develop some compassion and suddenly realizes she's using the same kind of language to talk about Mike as Dexter used to talk about her. She stops talking and tries to change the subject. Mike won't let her, saying that she's got all the arrogance of her class. Tracy tells him that he's teaching her there is no upper or lower class, and that people are just people. They bicker a little longer, and then Mike suddenly tells Tracy he thinks she's wonderful. Tracy is at a loss for words as Mike says more complimentary things. He suddenly stops. For a moment Tracy is angry again, but she melts into his arms when Mike kisses her. They talk for a moment about how the trembling they're both feeling must be love, or something like it. They kiss again and then run out to the swimming pool when they see people coming.

Act 2 Scene 2 Part 1 Analysis

The script doesn't quite make it clear exactly what Sidney Kidd does that makes Mike dislike him so much. It's clear that the Lords don't like him simply because he seems intent upon invading their privacy and destroying their reputation, but all we know for sure about his relationship with Mike is that he works him too hard. It can be inferred, however, that Mike resents Kidd because Kidd's more interested in making money than in anything expressive of true feeling. If that is indeed the case and then Kidd and his attitudes represent another aspect of the privileged class that Mike resents so much, the belief that anything other than what they want has no value.

Tracy reveals more of what's behind the mask she's finally realizing that she wears. The reason could be because of the champagne or because of everything that was said to her in the previous scene or perhaps because she's actually fallen for Mike a little. Her comments about the pain in Dexter's eyes and about what Mike is teaching her, as well as her sudden surge of feeling when he kisses her, combine to suggest that she not only wants to be loved but wants *to* love, and not just judge. At the same time, Mike is learning the same lesson. Tracy makes the point discussed earlier that he's the same kind of snob she is, holding people to high standards of behavior. As each reveals humanity and vulnerability to the other, they each move further along their journeys of transformation, and the play develops its theme that true transformation is possible through honest, intimate human connection.

Act 2 Scene 2 Part 2

Act 2 Scene 2 Part 2 Summary

Sandy comes onstage with some photographs. He's chased by Liz, who wants them back. He convinces her that he'll give them back once he's through with them. and thenHe also convinces her to give him Sidney Kidd's private phone number. As Liz watches, Sandy calls Kidd and tells him to come to Philadelphia immediately because Mike's been in an accident and is calling for him. Kidd agrees to come down, and Sandy hangs up. He then asks Liz whether she's in love with Mike, and Liz refuses to answer. As Dexter comes on, Sandy asks why Liz doesn't tell Mike how she feels. Liz says he's still got a few things to learn. She adds that if another woman came along, she'd fight for him, but if the woman in question was going to get married the next day, it wouldn't be a problem.

As Liz goes out, Dexter asks Sandy whether there are complications. Sandy answers vaguely that there might be and then tells Dexter to make himself at home. Sandy goes out. George comes in from another direction and angrily asks Dexter what he's doing there. Dexter says he could ask George the same question. George says he called Tracy earlier on her bedroom line, but she didn't answer. Dexter discovers Tracy's jewelry and hides it in his pocket. and thenThen he tells George he'd better go to bed. They both see Mike coming, and George says he's staying. Dexter stays as well, watching from a corner as Mike comes in, carrying Tracy. As Tracy mumbles incoherently, Mike explains that the effects of the alcohol hit as soon as she got into the water. Dexter stops George from interfering and gives Mike directions to Tracy's room. Dexter tells him to come right back out as soon as he's put her into bed. Mike takes Tracy inside.

Dexter comments that it's likely Tracy won't remember any of what's happened, since she blanked on what happened the other time she got drunk (the night she climbed on the roof). George and Dexter argue over whether they believe anything happened between Mike and Tracy, and Dexter comments on how George seems to have no willingness to consider Tracy's side, adding that she's only human. George's temper seems about to explode. Then Mike returns, and Dexter strikes him. George asks what right he has to do that, and Dexter says that until the wedding he's got the rights of a husband. George goes out, and Dexter apologizes to Mike, saying that he thought he should hit him before George did. The Night Watchman passes, saying he'd hoped it was George that got hit.

Act 2 Scene 2 Part 2 Analysis

What exactly the photographs of Sidney Kidd show, and how Liz got them, is never completely explained. It's easy to understand, however, that they contain images that Sandy believes Kidd will not want publicized. This is why he wants to use them in the

article. Meanwhile, Liz's comment to Sandy at the end of their scene reinforces the previously discussed idea that she knows Mike and Tracy have fallen for each other, but she is willing to let things run their course. This makes her one of the wisest and most compassionate characters in the play, a direct contrast to Tracy, Mike and, as the end of the scene reveals, George, who reveals himself to be as judgmental as Tracy once was. This is something that Dexter clearly notices and comments on, the way that George evidently has no compassion for Tracy's condition. He is more than willing to jump to conclusions in the same way that Tracy was accused of by Dexter earlier. Meanwhile, Dexter exhibits exactly the kind of compassion that George lacks by hiding Tracy's jewelry. He already sees Mike coming with Tracy and wants to prevent George from becoming even angrier. It's even possible that Dexter is acting out of the feelings represented by the True Love, an idea supported by the action in Act 3.

Act 3 Part 1

Act 3 Part 1 Summary

Uncle Willie, dressed in formalwear for the wedding, speaks with Dinah, who explains that she needs his advice. She asks him whether he likes George, and when he says he doesn't, Dinah asks whether he'd be happy Tracy could be stopped from marrying him. Uncle Willie says that he'd cheer, and Dinah then explains that she has proof that Tracy has feelings for someone else. She saw Tracy with someone else early that morning. Dexter appears as Uncle Willie suggests that the wedding may go ahead anyway. Dinah insists that Tracy has to marry Mike. Dexter asks why Dinah thinks that, and Uncle Willie asks Dexter what he's doing there. Dexter explains that Tracy called him to ask him for advice on what to do about a hangover accompanied by terror. He then suggests that what Dinah saw was a bad dream.

Tracy comes in, walking unsteadily, wearing her wedding dress and Mike's watch. She says good morning and tells Dexter to go home. Dinah explains where everyone is and that it's after twelve. Tracy notices the watch and wonders whom it belongs to. She nearly stepped on it when she was getting out of bed. She also says that her jewelry is missing and that she must have left it at the dinner party last night. Then Dexter takes it out of his pocket and returns it to her. Tracy says she doesn't remember seeing him at the party, and Dexter says she should have taken a swim before going to bed. That always makes her remember things better. Tracy suddenly recalls exactly what went on the night before. Dexter and Uncle Willie decide that this would be the perfect time to get some coffee. They leave, with Dexter suggesting to Dinah that she tell Tracy her dream.

After Dinah says that she'll miss Tracy when she gets married and moves away, Dinah starts to tell Tracy her dream. After an interruption by Margaret, bustling through as she tries to find Seth, Dinah tells Tracy that she dreamed she saw Mike carrying Tracy from the pool, across the yard, up to the house and into her room. She says that she went and hid under the covers and fell asleep. She woke up a few hours later, peeked into Tracy's room and saw that Mike was gone. Tracy insists that he was never there at all, and Dinah agrees. Dexter told her it must have been a dream. When she hears that Dexter has heard the story, Tracy panics.

Seth comes in, complains about the minister and tells Dinah to go upstairs and get dressed. Tracy tells Seth she's glad he's there and apologizes for being a disappointment. Seth tells her he never said that and never will. He then goes out, looking for Margaret and George. Mike comes in from another direction. He and Tracy greet each other carefully. Dinah goes out, but not before she looks into the drawing room and comments that there are already a lot of people there for the ceremony.

Tracy asks Mike how his article is coming, and he says he's lost interest in the angle he was taking. He's suddenly become tolerant. They talk about how neither of them feels

any after effects of all the champagne they drank. They both say they enjoyed last night, and Mike says he enjoyed the last part especially. Tracy asks whether he means the swim, and Mike says that's exactly what he means. He calls her darling. Tracy asks him not to call her that and not to say anything again. Mike understands her to mean that she's going through with the wedding, and Tracy says she is. Mike suggests they have no regrets about what happened the night before. Tracy starts to ask what exactly there should be no regrets about, but she can't bring herself to complete the question. She asks what time it is. Mike realizes his watch is missing. Tracy realizes the wristwatch she found is his, and she suddenly has an idea what, exactly, she might have regrets about.

Act 3 Part 1 Analysis

The action of this section builds to the tentative, polite, hangover-ridden conversation between Tracy and Mike. Piece by horrifying piece, Tracy puts together the puzzle of what she can't remember, imagining the worst. Mike's enthusiastic declarations convince her that the worst is actually what happened. Her feeble determination to go through with the wedding indicates that there are still aspects of the old Tracy left. She still believes she's got to maintain appearances. However, the forthcoming action of the last part of the scene suggests that as a result of learning the same sort of lesson as Mike, she's able to both accept and respond to her true feelings and those of the people around her, instead of rigidly sticking to what she thinks is the right thing.

Act 3 Part 2

Act 3 Part 2 Summary

Dexter comes in with a drink he says is guaranteed to make Tracy feel better. Mike goes out to get one for himself. Tracy has some of the drink and then calls George. She tells him to come right over, agreeing to read the note he sent over earlier. She tells a servant to bring the note and then thanks Dexter for trying to help her through the morning. Dexter asks her what she thought of his wedding present. She says she thought it was sweet, and they talk for a while about the True Love. The boat was yare, but Tracy wasn't. Dexter says he's planning to sell it to someone that Tracy can't stand, and he adds that he's planning to build a new boat and call it the True Love II. Tracy says that in memory of the night before he should call it the Easy Virtue, but Dexter tells her that virtue isn't ruined by a single miss-step. People are often better off having made a mistake or two and learned from them.

The servant returns with the note from George and tells Tracy that all the wedding guests have arrived. As Tracy reads the note, Liz and Mike come in, followed by an excited Sandy. He shouts that Sidney Kidd has come and is reading the expose he wrote. He explains to Liz and Mike what he's done, and Liz comments that it won't be too hard for Mike to resign from the magazine now. As Sandy goes out to find out how Kidd is doing, the minister comes in looking for Tracy. Dexter tells him she's on her way, and the minister goes back out.

Tracy reads the note from George, which says in outraged language that George deserves an explanation. George comes in, and Tracy says she hasn't got an explanation, adding that George might as well say good-bye then and there. Liz urges Mike to say something, but Mike stays quiet. George angrily demands to know what went on the night before. Tracy asks George to understand that as a result of what happened she's somehow "more of a person." George says he can't understand that, and Tracy says she's not surprised. Mike finally speaks up, saying that nothing more than a swim and a couple of kisses happened. He carried Tracy up to her room, put her to bed and then left. Tracy demands to know why Mike found her so unattractive that he didn't do anything, but Mike says that he didn't want to take advantage of her. Tracy's anger disappears, and George says it's a relief. Liz's ironic comments make him angry, though. Liz explains that the champagne made Tracy do what she did, which makes George insist that Tracy never drink again. Tracy refuses. George talks about how he expects his wife to behave, and Tracy says she's angry that he so easily believed the worst.

Sandy rushes in with the news that Kidd loves the expose and wants to publish it. When George realizes that Kidd is there in person, he takes it as a compliment and urges Tracy to get on with the wedding. Tracy says she's not going to marry him. She says goodbye, adding that she knows she'd make him unhappy. As George leaves, saying it's probably just as well, Dexter comments that he thought George would see it that

way. George says that Dexter's to blame for the breakup of the wedding, him and his entire class. Mike makes an ironic comment, and George goes out.

The orchestra starts playing Tracy's entrance music. Tracy panics, and Mike asks her to marry him. Tracy refuses, saying that Liz probably wouldn't like it. Neither Tracy nor Mike is completely sure that marriage to each other is what they want. Mike and Liz withdraw just as Dexter tells Tracy she's been gotten out of jams before. Margaret, Seth, Uncle Willie and Dinah run in. Tracy says she's not going to be gotten out of this one, opens the door to the drawing room and begins to address the wedding guests. She begins by apologizing. and thenThen, she runs out of things to say. As Dexter prompts her, he borrows Margaret's wedding ring. He gives it to Mike to hold as best man. Then, he tells Tracy to say that the wedding that should have happened two years ago but didn't because she eloped is going to happen now. Tracy suddenly realizes what she's saying. She closes the doors and promises Dexter to be yare. Dexter says she can be whatever she wants. The others go into the drawing room, leaving Tracy and Seth alone. Seth tells Tracy that she looks like a goddess, but Tracy says that she feels like a human being and it's wonderful. They go in to the drawing room.

Act 3 Part 2 Analysis

The Sidney Kidd subplot reaches its climax in this scene, with Sandy's revelation that Kidd is going to publish the article and photos. Again, it's not exactly clear what either contains, but because we've understood that both the article and photos reflect negatively on Kidd, we can also understand that Kidd doesn't care what he publishes. It can be inferred that Kidd believes a sensationalist article of any kind, even about him, is likely to sell magazines. The fact that he's going to publish Sandy's article confirms that he's as money hungry as Mike and Tracy believe him to be.

The play's main plot involving Tracy's marriage also reaches its climax in this section as Tracy confronts in George exactly the same kind of opinionated, judgmental tendencies that she herself has displayed all her life towards her father, Dexter and the world. She has completed her journey of transformation into a human being. This scene makes it clear that as a result of her experience with Mike, which revealed the kind of self-frailty that Dexter suggested she needed to discover, she has learned compassion for herself and for other people, even George. Her marriage to Dexter symbolizes her long-delayed union with her real, compassionate, emotional, fully human self, and her simultaneous realization that true love has always been there, from her father and from Dexter.

For his part, Mike also shows how much he's been transformed. His proposal of marriage is as unrealistic as Tracy suggests, but it is nevertheless passionately fueled by his discovery of a new way of looking at the world. It seems pretty clear that he and Liz are going to end up together, making Liz even more of a parallel to Tracy. Both their second marriages look as though they're going to work out better than their first.

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Characters

Mike (Macauly) Connor

Mike Connor is the author of a novel and a collection of short stories. Yet because creative writing does not earn enough money, Mike is reduced to writing "cheap stuff for expensive magazines," such as his present assignment to cover the Lord-Kittredge wedding.

Although he is initially hostile to the Lord family, his feelings soon change. He warms to Sandy, who joins forces with him in attacking Sidney Kidd, and he is attracted to Tracy's charm and beauty. At play's end, Mike even offers to marry Tracy, who gently but firmly rebuffs him. Although his future is left uncertain, it seems plain that Mike will leave his job at *Destiny* and perhaps become involved with Liz.

C.K. Dexter Haven

Dexter is a young, good-looking man. Wealthy and privileged, he has a passion for designing and racing yachts. He is still in love with his ex-wife, Tracy. At one point in the play, Dexter harshly attacks Tracy for her judgmental and unforgiving attitude when he was battling alcoholism, and criticizes her choice of Kittredge for a husband.

However, these attacks do not really resolve the unspoken question, which is never adequately addressed in the play: how abusive was Dexter to Tracy? Nonetheless, with some skillful targeting of his rival's weak points, Dexter manages to get rid of his rival for Tracy's affections; consequently, he proposes to her for a second time, and she promptly accepts.

Liz Imbrie

Liz Imbrie is the photographer who accompanies Mike to do a story on the Lord family. A young career woman, she provides a contrast to Tracy Lord's privileged but somewhat vacant existence. She is in love with Mike.

George Kittredge

George Kittredge is a handsome, industrious self-made millionaire. His fiancee, Tracy, admires him because she views him as "a great man and good man; already he's of national importance." Tracy is attracted by the qualities that made him so newsworthy in the past: his "rags to riches" life history, his popularity, and his charismatic speaking power. Yet she fails to see that Kittredge' s rapid rise through the ranks owes much to his own ambition and class aspirations.

Tracy represents high society for Kittredge, and he believes that his marriage to her will signal his acceptance by upper-class society. His subsequent rejection of Tracy, on the most pompous terms possible, suggests that he still has much to learn about love and perception.

Dinah Lord

Dinah is the younger of the two Lord sisters. She is a precocious young woman, prone to occasional malapropisms, and rather assured of her own maturity when she is in fact, at times, quite strikingly innocent. Dinah is fond of her brother and sister as well as Dexter. She clearly wishes that Tracy and Dexter had remained together, and she impulsively invites Dexter to come over, hoping that his presence will remind Tracy of past happiness.

Dinah joins Tracy in pretending to the *Destiny* reporters that the Lord family is eccentric and pretentious. Her most entertaining moment, however, comes at the play's end when she misinterprets Mike's presence in Tracy's bedroom and melodramatically marshals the family's resources in order to save Tracy from her "illikit passion" and marriage to Kittredge.

Margaret Lord

Margaret is the mother of Tracy, Dinah, and Sandy. An attractive woman, she has put up with her husband's philandering for many years. They are separated at the time of the play.

Sandy Lord

Sandy is Tracy' s younger brother. A newspaper editor working for the *Saturday Evening Post*, he is light-hearted and witty. Unlike Tracy, he has made a happy marriage; in fact, his wife has just given birth to their first child. Sandy, like Tracy, is concerned about the family's reputation, and arranges a deal with *Destiny* editor Sidney Kidd: the magazine will suppress its planned expose of Seth Lord's affairs and instead print a story about Tracy's marriage.

However, Sandy decides to write an expose on Kidd with Mike and Liz. In part, the expose is intended as revenge for the intrusive prying into the family business; in addition, it is meant as punishment to the man who has sold out Liz's and Mike's creative talents for a few dollars.

Seth Lord

Seth Lord is Tracy's father. A wealthy and successful man, he has long been involved with a colorful dancer named Tara Maine. This seems to have been the cause of his

separation from his long-suffering wife, Margaret. However, Seth has other explanations for his adultery and for the collapse of his marriage: he blames Tracy's critical attitude for his pursuit of the youthful dancer, and argues that the "ideal daughter" would be one who "blindly" loves her father and believes that "he can do no wrong." Tracy and her father reconcile by the end of the play.

Tracy Lord

Tracy Lord is the eldest daughter of Margaret and Seth Lord. Her beauty, wealth, wit, and cleverness hide a somewhat static interior. As a young woman, she eloped with her childhood friend, the equally wealthy and leisured C.K. Dexter Haven. They divorced after just ten months because of his excessive drinking and abuse. As the play opens, she is just a day away from marrying a self-made and industrious man named George Kittredge.

However, the situation is not as rosy as it seems. Tracy still has feelings for her ex-husband, and is deeply hurt by his bitter criticism of her as unfeeling and intolerant. Furthermore, she is profoundly alienated from her philandering father, Seth Lord. She starts to believe that she has made a mistake with Kittredge; she realizes that he has views and dreams that are strikingly different from her own. Lastly, Tracy finds herself attracted to the attractive, liberal writer Mike Connor, who sees past her brittle facade and tough manner. Tracy's final decision to remarry her ex-husband represents an attempt to recapture the happiness they once shared together.

Mac

Mac is the night watchman.

Uncle Willie

Uncle Willie is Tracy's good-natured uncle. He is a philanderer and pinches women's bottoms when he has the chance.

Themes

Prejudice and Tolerance

Tracy Lord believes that her uncompromising morals are part of her strong character: she expects "exceptionally high standards for herself and "lives up to them." She is disappointed when others fail to live up to her standards. In fact, her father's behavior caused a deep schism in their relationship, as she was unable to forgive him. Also, her husband's alcoholism led to their estrangement; instead of trying to help him, she had rejected him for his weakness.

Tracy's brief fling with Mike, which becomes the source of many comic misunderstandings in Act III, enables her to break free of her own self-imposed moral straitjacket and become more sensitive to human weakness. By the end of the play, she has cast off her prejudices and embraced a more tolerant standard from which to judge herself and others.

Public vs. Private Life

The stimulus for much of the comedy in *The Philadelphia Story* is the impending revelation of Seth Lord's adulterous affair with Tina Mara. The forthcoming article in *Destiny* horrifies the Lord family, for they value their reputation highly, particularly Tracy.

Moreover, they value their status as members of the Philadelphia elite, and members of this group were expected to be discreet. Thus much of the original impetus for the comedy of manners hinges upon the Lord family's attempt to cover up past misdeeds.

The Lord family's concern about their public reputation is cleverly emphasized in their playful decision to act out a stereotype in front of reporters. Tracy acts the part of simpering hostess, while Dinah acts like an eccentric and pretentious "idiot." In fact, the entire Lord family presents a false facade of their private life to the reporters: each member wants to maintain the illusion that the Lords are still happily married and that the family is fully functional.

The tension between public reputation and private behavior is of course the source of much of the play's comedy, but it also represents a growing concern among the leisured classes about the tabloid frenzy for scandal and gossip. Barry portrayed this increasing tension through his presentation of the lives of the rich and famous.

Style

Stage Directions

Detailed stage directions are a very noticeable feature of *The Philadelphia Story*. There are three simple reasons for this. First, although the dialogue was strong in itself, it depends upon staging. Imprecise staging and inappropriate gestures detract from the impact of the dialogue.

Second, Barry was a consummate producer of plays: he understood much about stagecraft, and knew that if he wanted to replicate the success of one play all over the country, he had to give directors of amateur companies precise guidance.

Third, *The Philadelphia Story* is written realistically, and Barry worked hard to give the audience the impression that the action unfolding in front of their eyes was, indeed, an accurate representation of "the real thing."

Also, Barry's stage directions enable the actors to add nuance to their characterizations. For instance, when Mike strikes a match, Tracy offers him a light from her lighter. The action is amusing because of Tracy's pretense, but, because it is also a classic gesture of attraction between men and women, it is also a nice hint to the audience that Mike and Tracy may be interested in each other.

Comedy of Manners

By and large, the great American playwrights of the twentieth century are dramatists such as Arthur Miller, August Wilson, and Eugene O'Neill. Drama often appears more resonant and universal; in contrast, comedy is invariably limited to themes such as marriage, adultery, and sex, and reflects contemporary society. These qualities can date comedy faster than drama.

The comedy of manners, a distinct sub-genre within the light comic tradition, is better able to survive the vagaries of time and fashion because its humor depends upon character foibles and upon situation humor, such as misunderstandings and identity switches.

The great nineteenth-century master of the comedy of manners was Oscar Wilde, whose plays included the masterpiece, *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895). In this popular play, comedy is created not only by Wilde's dazzling wit, but also by numerous confusions of identity and revelations of double lives. Philip Barry owes a great debt to Wilde in his use of intricate plots, confused identities, and comic misunderstandings.

Historical Context

World War II

The rise of totalitarian regimes in Germany, Italy, and Japan during the 1930s tipped the scales toward a world war. These dictatorships known as the Axis alliance began to forcibly expand into neighboring countries. For instance, in 1936 Benito Mussolini's Italian troops took over Ethiopia, which gave them a strong foothold in Africa. In 1938 Germany annexed Austria; a year later, German forces occupied Czechoslovakia. Italy took control of Albania in 1939.

On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland and World War II began. On September 3, 1939, a German U-boat sank the British ship *Athenia* off the coast of Ireland. Another British ship, *Courageous*, was sunk on September 19. All the members of the British Commonwealth, except Ireland, soon joined Britain and France in their declaration of war.

The Great Depression

Contrary to popular belief, the stock market crash of 1929 did not trigger the Great Depression of the 1930s; rather, many economic analysts attribute the depressed economy to problems within the international stock market and investment banks. In fact, it seems that Great Depression owed more to the legacy of the First World War (in particular Britain and America's punitive reparation policy) and to technological advances that increased profits but made many workers redundant. Agricultural, mining, and textile markets, traditionally the source of great profit, were also depressed.

From 1929 to 1932, unemployment in America rose from about 1.5 million to about fifteen million. This extraordinarily rapid rise in unemployment placed tremendous strains upon social services. Farmers were also suffering. By the mid-1930s, drought and bank foreclosures had driven farm prices down by more than 50% and many tenant-farmers were forced off their land.

In the face of this unprecedented social and economic crisis, the American president, Herbert Hoover, held out for the upswing in "market forces" that he felt sure would put an end to the escalating crisis. The voters were not so confident, and in 1933 they elected the Democratic presidential candidate, Franklin D. Roosevelt, to office. He immediately began implementing his "New Deal" reform plan: relief for the unemployed, fiscal reform, and stimulating measures to boost economic recovery. With the escalation of arms production in the late 1930s, America finally began to recover from the Great Depression.

Critical Overview

The Philadelphia Story was well received when the play first premiered on Broadway at the Shubert Theater on March 28, 1939. *The New York Times* praised the playwright and the Theater Guild company for their "top form" and called the play a "gay and sagacious comedy." That review was typical of the critical response.

The play has remained popular for several decades. It was made into a successful movie in 1940, which starred Katherine Hepburn. However, in the 1960s and 1970s, American critics were more interested in social protest drama and tended to overlook Barry's writing as light entertainment. When they did turn to Barry with a serious eye, they explored several elements of his work.

Francis Wyndham, writing in the *Times Literary Supplement*, focused on the father-daughter relationship that figures as a background theme in some of Barry' s plays. His somewhat unusual argument hinted at "incestuous undertones" in Barry's writing.

Moreover, Wyndham evidenced a prejudice against Barry's style of light comedy: "Barry was himself prouder of his serious flops than of his tailor-made successes, but... the verdict of *Variety* and the Broadway public has been sadly justified by the passage of time ... the frankly artificial framework of drawing-room comedy was necessary to preserve the frail but genuine spark of Barry's talent."

Unable to appreciate Barry's mastery of the comedy of manners, he chose to concentrate on the more obscure and unconventional elements of Barry's writing and to dismiss the very things that were Barry's strengths.

Albert Wertheim, writing a few years later in *Educational Theatre Journal*, was able to appreciate Barry in his own right. He recognized Barry as "one of the few masters of the American comedy of manners," and contended that Barry had surmounted the inherent challenges in the genre: "As all comedies of manners do, Philip Barry's demand a great sense of style from actors and actresses who must demonstrate the wit and urbanity that wealth and social position can foster, yet at the same time show the foibles and failures that exist despite social prominence and material well-being."

Wertheim praised the play mainly because of Barry's compelling characterization of Tracy Lord and in particular because of her development as a character. He asserted that the major "business of Barry's play [is] to bring Tracy Lord a comic insight that will enable her to harmonize her social poise with her inner humanity ... to produce, in short, something akin to Barry's idea of true human grace." Tracy must soften her "morally uncompromising" attitude towards people's behavior, and she does this through her own personal experience of a fall from grace.

Wertheim's essay, written after the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, virtually ignores the question of whether the play was still relevant in such changed times. Why,

for instance, should Tracy's journey of self-discovery end in a return to her abusive ex-husband?

Wertheim also emphasized the more conservative representation of class in the play: "Barry's aim was at least in part a revaluation of the merits and basic humanity of the upper class after the flogging it received at the hands of the social revolutionary playwrights of the Depression years." Yet, he did not discuss Barry's representation of the Depression era in the play, nor offer an explanation of precisely what the supposed "merits" of the upperclass were.

In 1988 Gary Green echoed Wertheim's praise of the play. Green maintained that beneath the "wittily and elegantly presented portrait of Philadelphia's mainline society," Barry questioned "class mores and conventional ideas about marriage" and advocated "the value of tolerance."

Also like Wertheim, Green accepted the play's surface representation of class, particularly Barry's apparent redemption of the alternately despised and idolized upper class. Mike and George are Tracy's "social inferiors." Mike is crippled by "the inverted snobbery of the proletarian intellectual" and perceives "the rich as non-productive, social parasites. " George is a "parvenu who has embraced the restricted conventionality of the moneyed upper class to which he aspires."

Yet some critics assert that the "moneyed upper class" in *The Philadelphia Story*, just as in other Barry comedies, have a remarkably flexible set of moral standards, and George's problem is that his moral standards are out of kilter with the Lord family values. Moreover, although Barry celebrates the Lords' urbanity and wit, he does not present them as productive members of society.

Although Barry is considered one of America's best writers of comedies of manners, the true complexity of his writing is underappreciated. The best comic writers can speak to their own times and to later generations: it is this rare skill that makes their work enduring. Barry is one such writer.

Criticism

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

Critical Essay #1

Ifeka is a Ph.D. specializing in American and British literature. In this essay, she analyzes Barry's treatment of class issues in The Philadelphia Story.

Barry's comedies are almost all set in the world of "high society" and feature characters who are rich, privileged, and educated. This does not mean, however, that he sets out to celebrate the upper-class; in fact, Barry subtly explores class conflict in many of his comedies, including *The Philadelphia Story.*

Barry is no radical, however, and while he presents his audiences with hints of the conflicts that underscored the myth of American egalitarian-ism, he never moves beyond this gentle thematization of class conflict. In fact, his endings usually reinforce rather than challenge the status quo.

The Lords, as their surname boldly asserts, are so firmly entrenched as leaders of Philadelphia society as to almost be American aristocrats. Pennsylvania, the home of so much revolutionary activity during the American Revolution, is home to an established social hierarchy that would have made the American Loyalists proud.

Barry emphasizes this ironic twist of history in a tense exchange between Sandy and Mike early in the play. The two men discuss the present Democratic Roosevelt administration, and Mike asks assuming the Sandy is a conservative "I suppose you're all of you opposed to the Administration." Sandy wittily responds, "No as a matter of fact we're Loyalists."

Sandy's word play hints that the Lords *may* be liberal supporters of the Roosevelt Administration, but also suggests that their sympathies would have been "Loyalist" (or pro-British, anti-Revolutionary) during the American Revolution.

The same exchange between Mike and Sandy is critical to Barry's development of the theme of class conflict. In it, Sandy reveals himself to be sensitive about his family's wealth and privilege: "I think you ought to give us a break... in spite of certain of our regrettably inherited characteristics, we just might be fairly decent." Mike, however, is not so quick to set aside his suspicions.

These suspicions are confirmed when Sandy admits that although he, like Mike, does work in the newspaper industry, the two men are on opposite sides of the divide: Mike, a journalist, represents the working man, whereas Sandy, an editor, organizes and dictates policy and is therefore management. Mike announces brusquely that he is "opposed to everything" Sandy represents, but Sandy responds coolly that Mike's magazine "is hardly a radical sheet," and asks him snidely, "what is it you're doing boring from within?"

A moment later, he adds that Mike's idol, Thomas Jefferson, was never a man of the people, but rather, like the Lords, came from a background of wealth and privilege: "Have you ever seen his house at Monticello?"

The two men's opposing interests and perspectives are only reconciled in their joint and somewhat underhanded decision to collude in the blackmailing of Mike's editor, Sidney Kidd. Sandy acts in the interests of the Lord family to reveal Kidd's own dirty past; Mike, only half-aware of what he is doing, reveals the necessary information, because he believes that Kidd is degrading his creative talent. Their action is hardly one of class resistance: rather, each man is inspired to strike out at Kidd for his own reasons, and each man joins forces with the other only in order to achieve this goal. However, it suggests that they have reached a rapprochement.

Barry's ambivalent attitude towards class difference is most apparent in the characterization of George Kittredge. George, whom Tracy describes as an "angel," was once a dirty angel: a coalminer who worked in the mines and rose through the ranks to the head of the company. Early in the play, Sandy asks Tracy whether George was "sore" about a recent newspaper article about him, in which he was identified as a "former coal miner." The audience never hears Tracy's response to this question, but they are alerted to George's *nouveau riche* status and to the possibility of tension arising in the family about his recent shift from miner to boss.

Mike seems to share Sandy's somewhat snide attitude to George's social elevation, albeit in a different way. He describes George as "up from the bottom," a word choice that perhaps inadvertently links the low depths of the mine shafts with poverty's negative associations. Sandy's response shows that he, for once, is aware of the word's dual meanings: "Just exactly and of the mine."

Mike then makes plain why he is suspicious of Kittredge: "National hero, new model: makes drooping family incomes to revive again." Kittredge may well have done a tremendous job of reorganizing the failing mines, but at what cost? The mine may well run better in its "new model," but the only people whose fortunes seemed to have revived in the wake of its reorganization are the owners, "the drooping family."

No mention is made of the workers the miners themselves and the question hangs in the air: who suffered, who benefited, who was laid off in order to revitalize the mines? This ominous question is answered a short time later, when Kittredge announces that his plans to reform the mines extend to reforming the unions: there is a lot, he says, that is "yet to be done with Labor relations."

Kittredge is crucial to the overall plot development in particular to Tracy's developing ambivalence about her impending marriage and it is worth examining his character in more detail. The first time he appears on stage, Tracy introduces him as "my beau," Liz compliments him on his appearance, and Kittredge himself announces that "I've shaken quite a lot of coal-dust from my feet in the last day or two." Tracy, who firmly believes her fiancee is angelically handsome, responds to Kittredge's self-conscious attempt at a

joke with one herself, but one that comes out sounding a little patronizing: "Isn't he beautiful? Isn't it wonderful what a little soap and water will do?"

This early suggestion that Kittredge is self-conscious and perhaps uncomfortable about his recent rise from rags to riches, and that their different backgrounds could cause problems between the couple, is evident later in the play. Kittredge, in a long conversation with Tracy, displays a concern about appearances and good taste that marks him as *nouveau riche*: as aspiring to the respectability and status of the upper classes. Dexter, on the other hand, who is born to wealth, "never concerns himself much with taste."

The difference between the two men comes down to being born into a certain class, and consequently being certain of one's station in life. For Kittredge, this means cutting certain "unimportant people" out of his social calendar, and establishing a circle which others will aspire to join, just as he, too, once longed to join Tracy in her golden shadow. "Our little house on the river up there ... I'd like people to consider it an honor to be asked there We're going to represent something, Tracy something straight and sound and fine. And then perhaps young Mr. Haven may be somewhat less condescending."

Kittredge's social insecurity leads him inevitably into the disastrous trap of comparing himself with someone who is inherently secure and confident. While this study in contrasts might be of interest simply in itself, it becomes significant because Kittredge has pursued and won someone who is from Haven's background, and who consequently shares his easy confidence and contempt for such *nouveau riche* concerns.

The play's ending is foreshadowed in these early scenes. It is also, however, something of a foregone conclusion that the couple are not suited, for in Barry's somewhat conservative worldview, like must marry like, and the great, the talented, the creative, must join forces with their equals.

The conclusion that like must marry like is inherently a conservative one. No one could fault Barry's characterization of Tracy Lord or Dexter Haven: both are charismatic, smart, witty people, and are clearly suited. But Haven's merits are contrasted with those of two working-class men: one of whom labors industriously in a socially acceptable (and hardly radical) profession, writing, and the other of whom rises from dirt to wealth.

The first, Mike Connor, seems at first glance the more radical and challenging of the two men: he identifies himself as a liberal in the Jeffersonian tradition, and is hostile to upper-class interests. Yet Mike's threat is considerably softened as a result of his romantic entanglement with Tracy: he proves himself a "true gentleman" by refusing to "take advantage" of her and offering, with an almost Victorian attitude, to marry her since he has been implicated in her damaged honor. Finally, he makes the "funny discovery" that "in spite of the fact that someone's up from the bottom, he may be quite a heel. And that even though someone else's born to the purple, he still may be quite a guy."

Kittredge, the "heel," may have raised himself by his bootstraps, but he disturbed Philadelphia's tranquil social hierarchy by aspiring above his class, and, moreover, by clinging to what are essentially middle-class moral values, rather than embracing the more accommodating liberal values of the upper class.

Barry's *The Philadelphia Story* is for the most part a frothy social comedy, but its sweet exterior masks darker themes not least of all amongst them the tensions between the social classes in the 1930s. Barry explores this tension firstly through the presence of Mike, an intruder with a chip on his shoulder, and secondly through the play's central event, the impending marriage of Tracy Lord and George Kittredge.

The lesson that affects Mike appearances can be deceiving conceals a real undercurrent of conservatism in Barry's plot. Tracy's rejection of Kittredge for Haven is certainly a rejection of idealization and of constrictive middle-class morality, but it is also a rejection of the social infidel, and a confirmation of the rigidity of the existing class hierarchy.

Source: Helena Ifeka, for *Drama for Students*, Gale, 2000.

Critical Essay #2

Calling The Philadelphia Story ' *'one of Barry's most accomplished works," Moe offers an overview of the play and discusses its place within the genre of class comedy.*

Philip Barry's social comedy in three acts is set in the house of a rich, high-society Philadelphia family in the 1930's. Tracy Lord, the mercurial, oldest daughter of the family's separated parents, is a divorcee who will, on the morrow, embark on a second marriage to a stuffy, self-made millionaire named George Kittredge. Puritanical about the frailties of others, Tracy has recently divorced a childhood friend, Dexter Haven, for his past alcoholic weakness, and holds no sympathy for her father, whose escapades with a dancer are to be made the feature of a popular magazine. To avoid public disclosure of a family scandal, Tracy's brother has persuaded the magazine's editor to suppress the story in return for letting two reporters do an inside story on Tracy's wedding. The journalists soon arrive: Mike Connor, an idealistic writer unafraid of venting disapproval of mainline society, and a young woman journalist clearly in love with her colleague. To render their observations harmless, Tracy assumes a deceptive facade and falsely identifies her uncle as her father, whom she has not asked to the wedding. Equilibrium tumbles when the father arrives along with her uninvited first husband, Dexter. When both men are reprimanded by Tracy for showing up, each accuses her of being coldly unforgiving of others' frailties. Disturbed by the accusation, the heroine gives way to a mutually shared attraction with Mike, leading to a kiss and a champagne-inebriated, midnight swim without suits. In realizing that she too is capable of lapses which demonstrate warm, human feelings, Tracy gains a truer measure of herself and a larger tolerance of others. Her bridegroom-to-be learns of the incident, suspects the worst, and demands an explanation on the wedding morning. Fully recognizing his pom-pousness, Tracy breaks off the engagement and happily accepts Dexter's offer of remarriage, and the wedding takes place with a new bridegroom.

One of Barry's most accomplished works, *The Philadelphia Story* belongs to a small group of his social comedies, *Holiday* among them, dealing with the nature of marriage and the life of the upper classes the stratum of society from which the author sprang and which he knew well. These refined comedies represent the most successful category of Barry's work, departing from his larger group of plays treating serious religious, moral, and psychological questions often developed in symbolic or fantastic form as in *Hotel Universe*. However, moral concerns remain essential ingredients in his comedies, including *The Philadelphia Story.*

Underlying the wittily and elegantly presented portrait of Philadelphia's mainline society, there is a theme which questions class mores and conventional ideas about marriage, advocating the value of tolerance. Tracy, the focal character, only has the possibility of self-fulfillment and hope for a happy marriage if she fully realizes that her nature is humanly frail and her lack of tolerance (and that in others) reprehensible. Having been quick to condemn the human frailties of her former husband and her father, she is shaken when told by them individually that her intolerance of weakness renders her a cold "Virgin Goddess" whose sinless high standards only spur on transgressions by

others. When, however, she recalls her affectionately intoxicated, unrestrained "skinny-dipping" escapade with Mike on the eve of the wedding, from which she had emerged chaste owing only to Mike's gentlemanly behavior, she learns that she too is capable of the same lively, hedonistic impulses she has condemned in others.

Embodying the thematic thrust of the play, Tracy's growth forms the spine of the action. The intolerant heroine is surrounded by several people committed to their prejudices and a refusal to accept ideas or behavior that differ from their own. Together with her class and family, she shares a suspicion and dislike of reporters, whom she sees, initially, as spying intruders with no manners or sensitivity until she realizes Mike's dimension as a writer and human being. Yet Mike, who like her fiance George is her social inferior, has the inverted snobbery of the proletarian intellectual who perceives the rich as non-productive, social parasites. George is a parvenu who has embraced the restrictive conventionality of the moneyed, upper class to which he aspires, and he expects the unconventional Tracy to fit his image of a wife. Upon discovering his fiancee's behavior with Mike, and shocked by it, his nasty reaction and demand for explanation reveal him to Tracy as the stuffed shirt he is. She then breaks off the engagement and kindly rejects a marriage proposal from Mike to accept that of Dexter, her tolerant first husband who has always understood and loved her. Her final decision reflects the central character's culmination of a journey toward self-understanding, tolerance, and humanity.

A fine example of its genre, *The Philadelphia Story* demonstrates its author's skilled craftsmanship in creating the milieu of high society peopled by three-dimensional, interesting characters within a well-structured and highly polished comic plot. The plot, whose humorous action arises from an attempt to keep a private scandal from exposure by the press, richly provides comic complications, confrontations, and revelations typical of an effective comedy of manners. In terms of characterization, the figure of Tracy Lord (which was written for, and was the springboard to fame for, Katharine Hepburn, both in the original and successful Broadway production and the subsequent motion picture version) remains a stunning portrait of an intelligent young woman who discovers tolerance and humanity. Reversing a typical pattern of the genre, the author shows in George Kittredge a man risen from the ranks who turns out to be a prig, and in Dexter Haven a man from society's upper crust who proves himself to be gallant and understanding. Also interestingly drawn are such characters as reporter Mike Connor, Tracy's unpredictable and hoydenish younger sister, and an uncle fond of pinching ladies' bottoms.

A successful 1980 Broadway revival gave proof of the play's durability, as have its frequent productions in regional theatre. With *The Philadelphia Story*, Barry has earned a firm place in American letters as an elegant writer of social comedy.

Source: Christian H. Moe, *"The Philadelphia Story"* in *The International Dictionary of Theatre,* Volume 1: *Plays,* edited by Mark Hawkins-Dady, St. James Press, 1992, pp. 604-06.

Critical Essay #3

Focusing on the charms ofKatherine Hepburn, the actress playing Tracy in the original production, Brown offers a mixed, though mostly favorable appraisal of Barry's play.

That there have always been two Philip Barrys has long since been well known to those who have followed Mr. Barry's double life as a dramatist. One of these has been the cosmic Mr. Barry who has fought an anguishing, often arresting, inner struggle as he has gone searching for his God in such scripts as *John, Hotel Universe, The Joyous Season,* and this winter's *Here Come the Clowns*. The other Mr. Barry, the first to be heard from and the one his largest public has always doted upon, is the dramatist who has shown a genuine flair for badinage and written such perceptive tearful comedies as *You and I, White Wings, Paris Bound, In a Garden, Tomorrow and Tomorrow,* and *The Animal Kingdom*

It is this second Mr. Barry, the smiling one with a lump in his throat, who has tossed off *The Philadelphia Story,* that play, so pleasant at times but so unimportant throughout, which can boast as its truest and most commanding virtue the fact that it brings Katharine Hepburn triumphantly back to our stage. Although Mr. Barry's new script is not in his best comic vein, through it shine those qualities, literate and ingratiating, which have distinguished his better comedies. It is the work of a man, sensitive and witty, who, even when he has embarked upon what proves to be something of a dramatist's holiday, turns up bearing his special gifts.

As he relates how a rich young Philadelphia divorcee, a chill perfectionist, a married virgin who has no understanding in her heart, is awakened to love and life by a drunken incident with a writer the night before she is to marry another man, Mr. Barry has difficulty starting his fable and nods at times, in the best Greek fashion, while keeping it going. Yet when once he has established his wealthy family, and abruptly indicated that they are supposed to be on their best behavior because their country home is being invaded by a writer and a lady photographer representing a magazine thinly disguised as *Destiny,* Mr. Barry's play begins to show agreeable signs of his authorship.

If his comedy is not a good one, if it forces one to think back to the superiority of *Paris Bound* which it often brings to mind, it has its commendable points. At least it passes the time, often very pleasantly. It bristles with amusing lines. It has scenes which indicate Mr. Barry's surety as a comic dramatist. It makes clear what a gay and intuitive mind is his and how polished can be his gift for dialogue. Even at its feeblest and most aimless, it is warmed by a winning sense of tolerance. Once again Mr. Barry may be turning Congreve into a cardinal, and advancing his old argument that a single transgression is no justification for divorce between two people who really love one another. But to this he adds a welcome and timely plea to the effect that people, not classes, are what matter; that poverty does not spell virtue any more than riches necessarily spell meanness.

At its best Mr. Barry's play is no more than a rich cloak which Mr. Barry, in a moment of Raleighesque gallantry, has spread wide for Miss Hepburn to walk upon. Miss Hepburn is not an actress easy to describe. It is difficult to distinguish between what she is and what she does. It is more than difficult; it is irrelevant. To an almost unmatched extent what she is, is also what she does.

What she is, as playgoers came to know in *The Warrior's Husband,* and as movie-goers realized in such films as *Morning Glory, Little Women,* and *Alice Adams,* is one of the most beautiful young women on our stage and screen and also one of the most fascinating. That on the screen she has wavered between performances of high excellence and those which have been said to be downright embarrassing by people who have had the heart to see them, only indicates, as does her more recent stage record of failure in *The Lake* and triumph in *The Philadelphia Story,* that Miss Hepburn is a performer who, more than most, needs to find the right script, to be protected by expert direction, and to have her very special gifts displayed to equally special advantage. As an actress she bears a greater resemblance than the majority of her rivals to the little girl with the curl in the middle of her forehead. Certainly when she is good, she can be very, very good indeed.

That she is blessed with uncommon endowments no one can deny who has seen her at her best or at her worst. She has intelligence, breeding, fire, a voice which in its emotional scenes can be satin, a body Zorina might look upon with envy, and a personality of such compulsion that, without meaning to do so, she can make the center of the stage wherever she happens to be. There is grace a lovely and arresting grace about her very awkwardness; about the tomboyish attitudes she strikes from time to time; and, most especially, about that free-limbed quality of hers which can turn her very crosses into the poetry of motion.

Most of all, there is Miss Hepburn's beauty. Dramatic critics, of course, have a way of pretending that an actress' beauty is of no importance either to them or to her art. What has led them to do this is at once a desire to seem judicial when appraising technique, and the fact the melancholy fact that so many of our actresses have had to get along (and done very nicely, thank you) unaided by beauty.

Miss Hepburn is not one of these. Beauty is decidedly in league with her. Nor is her loveliness of that languid, bovine sort so dear to the elder Edward with his well-known fondness for Lilys who, though eye-filling in their serenity, were apt to be more Jersey than Lily. Miss Hepburn's face is as interesting as it is pretty, as flexible as it is well-modeled. It has strength no less than temperament behind it. Above all, its decisive modeling enables Miss Hepburn to project her expressions onstage with the clarity of a close-up. With its high cheek bones, its almost equine spread, its generous mouth, and its sculptured features, it is the mask of a Bryn Mawr Garbo whose visual fascinations are endless. Moreover, Miss Hepburn can act. And act she does with agreeable results, not only by being what she is but by doing very nicely what she is called upon to do in Mr. Barry's script when, in the last act, he gets around to asking her.

Source: John Mason Brown, "Miss Hepburn in *The Philadelphia Story*" in his *Broadway in Review*, Norton, 1940, pp. 127-31.

Adaptations

The Philadelphia Story was adapted as a film in 1940. The film was directed by George Cukor and produced by Joseph L. Mankiewicz for MGM. It starred Katharine Hepburn as Tracy Lord, Gary Grant as C. K. Dexter Haven, and James Stewart as Macaulay Connor. Donald Ogden Stewart adapted Barry's play into a screenplay. This highly successful adaptation is still the best-known version of Barry's play.

In 1956 MGM produced a musical re-make of *The Philadelphia Story* entitled *High Society.* It was faithful to the original plot but was set during the Newport Jazz Festival and featured the playing and singing of Louis Armstrong. *High Society* was directed by Charles Walters and included a star-studded cast: Bing Crosby starred as C. K. Dexter Haven, Frank Sinatra as Macaulay Connor, Grace Kelley as Tracy Lord, and Celeste Holm as Liz Imbrie.

Topics for Further Study

Compare and contrast the stage and film versions of *The Philadelphia Story*. Discuss the advantages of film versions over stage productions.

Some critics have claimed that Barry tried to rescue the upper-classes from the overwhelmingly negative portrayal of them in contemporary theater. Do you think *The Philadelphia Story* is just such an attempt, or is it critical of high society?

Discuss Tracy Lord's maturation during the play. If the play had been written in the 1990s, would it have ended with her remarrying Dexter Haven? Write an ending for the play that you think is realistic for contemporary times.

Choose two minor characters in the play for instance, Margaret Lord and Liz Imbrie, or Seth and Willie Lord and contrast them. Consider the values and ideals these characters represent, and how their presence influences the audience's perception of Tracy Lord.

Compare and Contrast

1939:America feels the continuing effects of the Great Depression. Unemployment remains high and industrial production is low.

Today: The American economy booms: the Dow Jones Industrial Index passes the 10,000 mark, unemployment is at a record low, and inflation is under control.

1939: Europe erupts into full-scale war, pitting Nazi Germany and Italy against France and England. By the year's end, Germany has taken control of Poland, partitioning it with Russia, while Russia has seized Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and is preceding in its invasion of Finland.

Today: The conflict in the former Yugoslavia escalates. In the wake of widespread killing, NATO launches a peace-keeping mission and commits to air and ground warfare against Serbia.

1939: Scientists announce that they have succeeded in splitting uranium, thorium, and protactinium atoms by bombarding them with neutrons. Their success paves the way for the invention of the H-bomb in the final years of World War II.

Today: After the escalation of the nuclear arms race during the Cold War, the 1980s and 1990s were marked by attempts to reduce the superpowers' arsenal of nuclear weapons. Developing world nations such as India and Pakistan, however, are keen to acquire nuclear weapons, and recently each nation has announced the successful testing of nuclear weapons.

1939: Color television is demonstrated for the first time. Black-and-white televisions are sold to millions of households in the 1950s.

Today: Most American households own two televisions, and have access to over one hundred cable channels.

1939: American labor organizations unionize employees from mass-production industries such as the steel and automobile industries, and force employers to accept the validity of strike action and collective bargaining power.

Today: American labor organizations struggle to maintain their traditional membership, as mass-production industries move to Mexico or overseas. They also strive to unionize the massive (and often non-English speaking and itinerant) labor force of the textile, agricultural, and service industries.

1939: President Franklin D. Roosevelt maintains his commitment to liberal "New Deal" social programs and announces American neutrality in the European War. The following year, he is reelected president for a third term.

Today: Second-term Democratic President Bill Clinton survives an impeachment vote, and continues to enjoy strong popularity despite the impeachment vote and Lewinsky scandal.

What Do I Read Next?

Paris Bound (1927) is one of Barry's most successful comedy of manners. It concerns the fashionable and rich Jim and Mary Hutton. On their wedding day, the couple decides that they will be tolerant of extramarital affairs. Their bohemian ideals come under pressure when Mary learns that Jim has visited an old sweetheart when traveling abroad.

Barry's *Holiday* (1928) is an enjoyable comedy that depicts the relationship between Julia Seton, a millionaire's daughter, and Johnny Case, a hardworking young man. The Seton family cannot tolerate Case's determination to enjoy life when young and try to force him to join the family firm.

John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) displays Steinbeck's characteristic social realism and his determination to depict the lives of rural people with sympathy and understanding. He won the Pulitzer Prize for his epic novel about the struggles of an emigrant farming family who leave the dust bowl of the Midwest for the promised land of California.

Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* (1913) remains a popular comedy. It is about a professor, Henry Higgins, who decides that he can pass off a young Cockney flower-seller, Eliza Doolittle, as a society lady. Shaw's depiction of Eliza's rise to social acceptance allows him to comment upon the British class system while also providing his audience with light-hearted entertainment.

Royall Tyler was one of the first major American playwrights. His best-known play remains *The Contrast* (1787), a social comedy that contrasts the simply dignity of American mores with the foppery and pretensions of British fashion. Tyler drew upon Restoration comedy to create one of America's first comedy of manners.

Further Study

Brown, John Mason. "The American Barry," *mStillSeeing Things*, McGraw-Hill, 1950, pp. 30-7.

Brown includes reminiscences of Barry.

Gross, Robert F. "Servants of Three Masters: Realism, Idealism, and 'Hokum' in American High Comedy," in *Realism and the American Dramatic Tradition,* edited by William W. Demastes, University of Alabama Press, 1996, pp. 71-90.

Contends that scholars have overlooked the realism of American high comedy and have focused too much upon drama and social realism at the expense of American comedy.

Meredith, George. *Essay on Comedy,* Chapman and Hall, 1877, 99 p.

British poet and novelist George Meredith was also known as a literary critic. His *Essay on Comedy* was one of the most influential critical texts on high comedy during the late nineteenth century and continued to influence critics and writers during the first decades of the twentieth century.

Wolfe, Thomas. *Of Time and the River,* C. Scribner's, 1935, 892 p.

Wolfe attended the infamous 47 Workshop of George Baker Pierce in the 1920s. His semi-autobiographical novel includes a portrait of Baker in the character of Professor Hatcher.

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Project Editor
David Galens

Editorial
Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

Research
Michelle Campbell, Nicodemus Ford, Sarah Genik, Tamara C. Nott, Tracie Richardson

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Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
http://www.gale.com

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:

Editor, Drama for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535