The Real Thing Study Guide

The Real Thing by Tom Stoppard

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites".

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers".

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Introduction

From the overnight sensation of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1966) to the recent success of his script (with Marc Norman) for *Shakespeare in Love* (1998), Tom Stoppard has been acclaimed as one of the most important dramatic writers of the late-twentieth century. *The Real Thing* was first produced in 1982 on London's West End, and the cast included Roger Rees and Felicity Kendal (who subsequently became Stoppard's second wife). Its commercial and critical success was followed two years later by a sell-out production on Broadway in New York, with Glenn Close and Jeremy Irons in the main roles. That production won several Antionette "Tony" Perry Awards.

The play focuses upon Henry, who, much like Stoppard, is a successful playwright. Henry is married to an actress, Charlotte, who is playing the lead in his current play; he has fallen in love with another actress, Annie, for whom he soon leaves Charlotte. But is his new love "the real thing?" Underlying the major themes of love and adultery are related concerns. Does art influence life? Can life imitate art (the converse of the pro verb "art imitates life")? Must art have a political and social value, as many people in Britain were then arguing, or can it stand alone, as art for art's sake? Stoppard argues that intellectuals are taking political expression for literature, and he makes a strong case that art should be valued for its aesthetic merits alone.

Audiences in the 1960s and 1970s delighted in Stoppard's wit and cleverness, although they occasionally questioned whether the playwright could apply his genius to real life problems such as love and passion. *The Real Thing* ended such speculation and confirmed Stoppard's reputation for stylistic experimentalism and innovation.

Author Biography

Tom Stoppard was born Tomas Straussler in Czechoslovakia (now the Czech Republic) on July 3,1937. His family moved to Singapore in 1939; shortly after, his father, Dr. Eugene Straussler, was killed, and the family moved to India. There, his mother remarried a British army major named Kenneth Stoppard. When the family relocated to England after the War, Stoppard took his stepfather's name. He left high school at seventeen and worked as a journalist on the *Western Daily Press* while writing television and radio plays, short stories, and his only novel, *Lord Malquist and Mr. Moon* (1966).

Stoppard's absurdist play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1966) made him famous. The play was originally produced by the Oxford Theater Group on the Edinborough Festival Fringe; six months later it was bought and produced by the National Theater in London. The widespread acclaim that greeted this play promised great things, and in the past thirty years, Stoppard's reputation as a major contemporary playwright in the English language has grown by leaps and bounds.

Stoppard was first associated with Absurdism, a philosophical movement influenced by philosophers and writers such as Frenchman Albert Camus (*The Plague*), Italian Eugene lonesco (*The Chairs*), and Irishman Samuel Beckett (*Waiting for Godot*), as well as by a host of Polish and Czech writers who lived in communist regimes. Absurdist writers perceive the world as mysterious and incomprehensible, and this perception often engenders feelings of purposelessness and bafflement. But Absurdism is not a uniformly somber philosophy nor does it produce uniformly serious art; indeed, much of the great Absurdist theater is comedy, or tragi-comedy, and it is in this vein that Stoppard's metaphysical wit and passion for ideas found full expression.

The Real Thing, Stoppard's twentieth play, marked a major departure for the playwright. It was Stoppard's first play to focus upon love. Critics had previously complained that he was all flash and no substance, but *The Real Thing* proved that Stoppard could address eternal themes such as love and passion with genuine sensitivity and insight. It contains Stoppard's characteristic investigation of an ethical problem in this case the effects of adultery upon the vulnerable human heart and his characteristic intervention into contemporary discussions about art in this case the value of "political art." But when writing *The Real Thing*, Stoppard abandoned Absurdist stage practice for the tenets of realist drama.

Stoppard's life experience has influenced his writing in subtle ways. One of his plays, *Professional Foul* (1977) is set in his birth land, Czechoslovakia, and portrays the plight of dissidents living under a totalitarian regime. *Indian Ink* (1997) is set in India, during the heyday of British Empire (the early-twentieth century), and focuses upon the relationship between a liberal English woman traveler and a young Indian poet. Critics were quick to point out the identical occupation of *The Real Thing's*, protagonist and Stoppard and their common passion for cricket but fortunately chose not to obscure the integrity of the play by making stronger connections between "real" and "fictional" life.

Stoppard's life-long passion for the life and work of William Shakespeare and for Renaissance drama were on display in his screenplay (cowritten with Marc Norman) for the phenomenally successful 1998 film *Shakespeare in Love*, which starred Joseph Fiennes and Gwyenth Pal trow. He continues to write for film and stage and is considered by many to be one of the most important writers of the twentieth century.

Plot Summary

Act I

Max, an architect, is at home drinking and playing with cards, when his wife, Charlotte, returns home from a trip to Switzerland. Max questions Charlotte about her trip, but his queries are disjointed and digressive. Charlotte is confused. Suddenly he reveals to her that he has found her passport. Charlotte has not in fact been to Switzerland her present for him, placed in a duty-free bag, is nothing but a clever prop. Max assumes she has been away with a lover. He is devastated but resorts to ironic dialogue to contain his emotion. Charlotte, profoundly alienated from him, yet neither denying nor admitting his accusation, exits.

Scene 2 opens with a hostile exchange between Henry and Charlotte. At first, the audience believes that Henry is her lover. However, the audience soon realizes that they have it all wrong. Scene 1 was actually an extract from Henry's new play *House of Cards*. Charlotte, his wife, is the lead actress in it and Max her co-lead.

Charlotte is far from happy. She feels that she has landed her part in *House of Cards* because she is Henry's wife and not because of her acting ability. She is also resentful about the role she is playing. She complains to Henry that he cannot write female characters, and that she functions as the "feed" for Max's more substantial lines, which also garner better laughs. Charlotte's comments particularly about the audience's groan following the revelation of her character's adultery are very pertinent, since the real audience has probably just reacted in such a way.

Max enters, closely followed by his actress wife, Annie. Instead of bringing a bottle of wine, Annie brings a bag of vegetables to the little gathering. As soon as Charlotte and Max have gone into the kitchen, it becomes clear that Annie is having an affair with Henry. When Charlotte and Max reenter, the dialogue moves into another level: Henry and Annie continue to talk to each other intimately, but to Max and Charlotte, their dialogue appears to be part of the larger conversation. Much of the dialogue has *double entendres* that only the lovers and the audience understand.

The scene ends after the socially conscious Annie has talked at length about her latest *cause celebre*: an imprisoned soldier, Brodie, has "bravely" protested against his own army's missiles. Henry is skeptical about the value of such a cause, but Annie, who met Brodie before he was imprisoned, is determined to free him. However, for all her commitment, she reneges on a planned visit to the prison so that she can see Henry later that afternoon.

Scene 3 is a brief reprieve of Scene 1, though in this scene the action is not part of Henry's play and it is enacted between Annie and Max. Max has found Henry's handkerchief in the back seat of the car, where Henry left it after he and Annie made love. This revelation of the affair ends both marriages, and scene 4 finds the lovers

together. However, it is clear that there are underlying tensions between them. They clash about Annie's "faithful" devotion to Brodie. Annie is also annoyed when she fails to make Henry jealous about the male actor who is playing opposite her in a new production of *Miss Julie*. Nonetheless, the couple affirm their love for each other. Act I ends with Henry rushing out to pick up his daughter, Debbie, leaving Annie sorting through piles of paper.

Act II

Two years later, Annie and Henry are still living together but they are not living in complete harmony. They continue to have petty disagreements about music, and they continue to disagree about Brodie, who is still imprisoned for his act of protest. Annie is determined to produce a play that Brodie has written. She thinks that it will attract support for his cause. "A writer is harder to ignore. I thought, TV plays get talked about, make some impact. Get his case reopened."

Henry, however, thinks that Brodie cannot write. Henry believes that writing should be valued for its literary and aesthetic worth; but Annie believes that writing should be valued mainly for its political message and its social effect. Henry argues that words are intrinsically "innocent, neutral, precise." If a good writer uses them well, "you can build bridges across incomprehension and chaos." In contrast, Annie argues that if "you teach a lot of people what to expect from good writing ... [then] you end up with a lot of people saying you write well." Someone like Brodie "who really has something to write about, something real," will therefore be unappreciated.

The audience's reaction to Annie's argument is complicated by the contrast between Brodie and Henry's writing. It is further complicated when the audience learns that Henry has stopped writing literary plays, which he calls "the real stuff," and is instead writing TV science-fiction scripts, in order to finance his current lifestyle with Annie and his alimony payments to Charlotte.

Act II, scene 2 again reprises Henry's play, but with a dire twist: Annie embarks upon an affair with Billy, a fellow actor. Billy has read Brodie's play, and, like Henry, thinks that it is terrible, but he says that he will act in it for Annie. Throughout the scene the two lovers quote from the seventeenth century play *Tis Pity She's a Whore* by John Ford.

In Act II, scene 3, Henry and Charlotte's daughter appears onstage. Debbie has her father's talent for words but appears to be more realistic and pragmatic about love than him. In one telling interchange between them, Henry attempts to express his feelings about love but does so in ironic, elevated language. Debbie cuts through this: "Don't write it, Fa. Just say it. The first time you fell in love. What?"

Their affectionate interchange is followed by a conversation between Charlotte and Henry. Charlotte, somewhat mellowed, tells her ex-husband some truths about love and commitment.

Scene 4 reveals a glimpse of Annie's growing attachment to Billy. This is followed, in scene 5, by another reprise of Act I, scene 1, this time enacted between Henry and Annie. Henry has discovered that Annie is having an affair with Billy. But the scene is played differently from the earlier versions: neither lover walks out on the other. Instead, they try to negotiate in order to salvage the relationship. Henry is prepared to accept the affair because he still loves Annie and because Annie still loves him.

The complexity and painfulness of real life love is further explored in scene 7, in which the couple struggle to integrate the pain of the affair into their relationship. The final scene of the play, between Henry, Annie, and Brodie, suggests that their relationship will endure.

Act 1, Scene 1

Act 1, Scene 1 Summary

This play tells the story of a clever, extremely intellectual writer's first true experiences of love. The style of the play is a reflection of its substance - as the playwright moves from superficiality to deeper understanding, the play itself becomes less defined by its external characteristics (witty dialogue, detours into apparently unrelated conversations) and more defined by the universal truth, the "real thing," at the core of his experience.

Max is building a house of cards as a door opens offstage. He shouts out a warning not to slam the door just as the door slams and the house of cards collapses. He greets his wife, Charlotte, just returned from an apparent trip to Switzerland, in a witty and occasionally rambling style, that to Charlotte seems unusual. She asks if something's wrong, and Max reveals that he discovered Charlotte's passport in their recipe drawer - it seems she hasn't been to Switzerland at all. He also reveals that he knows she didn't go to Amsterdam when she said she did, since the appropriate stamp isn't in her passport. She tells him not to not go any further, saying she feels violated. He apologizes and then wonders aloud why he's apologizing for finding out he's been deceived. Charlotte starts to leave, Max asks who her lover is, and when she refuses to answer, asks how many lovers she actually has and if it's anyone he knows. Charlotte says "You aren't anyone I know" and goes out.

Act 1, Scene 1 Analysis

At first glance, this scene seems as though it's the start of the play. As the next scene reveals, however, it's the first scene of a play being performed by Charlotte and Max and written by Henry. The real play starts in the following scene, when Henry appears, Charlotte and Max appear in their real-life personas as his wife and friend respectively, and the true nature of all their relationships becomes apparent.

Even though it's not the start of the real play, however, this scene does represent an aspect of the play - a confrontation about infidelity within a long-term relationship. Similar scenes play out on two different occasions later in the play as characters within the world of *The Real Thing* (as opposed to the world of Henry's play) confront each other over similar questions of infidelity. While each scene contains different details, the stylistic and structural patterns of this scene (witty dialogue, careful questioning, and the ultimate confrontation) are the same.

What's important to note is that this first scene, as the following scene makes clear, is artificial, and created by Henry. The two other occasions on which the pattern is repeated are intended to be seen as "real." This aspect of the play's storytelling technique, the blurring of reality and artificiality, is repeated several times and with several variations. The prime purpose of this first scene, therefore, is to lay the

groundwork for examination of the play's core question - what's real and what isn't? What's a real feeling and what isn't? This is not only the source of the play's title, it's also the issue at core of Henry's journey of transformation as he moves from living a superficial life to a life that seems to be becoming more real.

The house of cards Max constructs at the beginning of the scene is a symbol functioning on the same level in both Henry's play, which is titled *House of Cards*, and *The Real Thing.* It represents the delicate construction of truth and lies, love and hate, fear and courage at the core of all the relationships in both plays and, *The Real Thing* suggests, at the core of every human relationship. The fact that Max's cards collapse foreshadows the collapse (or threatened collapse) of several relationships in both plays, as well as the collapse of several belief systems, particularly Henry's beliefs about feelings, relationships, and creativity.

Act 1, Scene 2

Act 1, Scene 2 Summary

Henry sits on the floor of his apartment surrounded by recordings and searching through them. Charlotte appears, having just awakened. Her conversation with Henry consists of equal parts friendly bickering and impatient affection. Their bantering dialogue reveals that Henry is a famous playwright, that he's about to appear on a radio program called *Desert Island Discs,* and that he's expected to play and discuss eight pieces of music he would take with him if he were to be marooned on a desert island. As he searches through his music, it's revealed that Henry is a much bigger fan of pop than he is of classical, that he and Charlotte have a teenaged daughter named Debbie, who they both adore, that Henry has invited Max for a quick visit, and that Charlotte doesn't want to see Max. When Max knocks, however, she resigns herself to seeing him and goes out to get dressed.

Henry shows Max in, saying Charlotte is out. Henry opens a bottle of champagne just as Charlotte comes back in. Conversation between the three of them reveals that Charlotte and Max are actors appearing in Henry's latest play, *House of Cards* (this is the point at which it becomes clear that the first scene was, in fact, a scene from *House of Cards*). They discuss the fact that performances aren't going well, that audiences aren't large, and that Charlotte thinks it's because the play isn't interesting. She says the only question it contains is whether her character has an affair, adding that when the audience finds out she doesn't, they become restless and uninterested with nothing dramatic to pay attention to, only more witty dialogue. She suggests that if Henry caught her having an affair in real life, he wouldn't be witty at all - he'd fall apart. Throughout the conversation, Henry and Charlotte make pointed comments to and about each other, which seem to be barely disguising genuine tensions in their relationship. Max is uncomfortable and eventually tries to leave, but Henry prevents him. There's a knock on the door, and Max tells Henry and Charlotte that he invited Annie to join them once the meeting of her committee, Justice for Brodie, is finished. After Max has gone, Charlotte tells Henry not to get Annie started on the subject of Brodie. Henry agrees.

Annie comes in carrying a shopping bag full of vegetables, which she says she picked up in passing, but which she suggests to Charlotte might do as a snack. Charlotte is none too pleased, but goes out to make a dip, as Henry jokes about the originality of Annie's thinking. Henry, Max and Annie discuss Henry's fondness for pop music, and what he's going to talk about on *Desert Island Discs*. This conversation that leads Henry to talk at length about how he finds pop music so real and meaningful. Max, becoming uncomfortable after being taunted by Henry into singing an old pop song, goes to help Charlotte, just as Charlotte is coming back in with the quickly-prepared dip. She tells Max he can chop vegetables, going angrily out into the kitchen with him after Henry criticizes the dip.

Alone together, it quickly becomes clear that Annie and Henry are having an affair. Conversation reveals that Henry had planned to wake Annie up with an obscene phone call, but when Max answered had to come up with an excuse for calling, and ended up inviting Max over. Annie tells Henry he's too cautious, and suggests that he actually wants their feelings to spoil so he'll know it's not "the real thing." Henry protests that he doesn't steal other men's wives. Annie takes him to mean that he doesn't love her and becomes angry. Max rushes back in having just cut himself on the finger. Henry binds it in a clean white handkerchief from his pocket. Max goes back out to run it under the tap. When he's gone, Henry and Annie apologize to each other, with Annie suggesting that it's time they told Charlotte and Max the truth.

Charlotte comes back in with cut-up vegetables, saying that Max is still in the kitchen making another dip. Henry indicates to Annie he can't go through with her plan. Annie says it's all right, and their undercurrent of intense feeling continues throughout the rest of the scene as Henry and Charlotte discuss, among other things, plans for Debbie and the rest of the day, Max's fresh dip (which Annie gets Henry to lick off her finger), and Max's cut finger. Max comes back in and returns Henry's handkerchief while Henry re-directs the conversation by asking Annie about her work with the Brodie Committee. In spite of Max's attempts to change the subject, Annie tells how she met Brodie on a train when they were both on their way to an anti-missile demonstration.

Conversation reveals that Brodie is a soldier, that he was arrested and imprisoned for protesting against the presence of American rockets on British soil, that Annie visited him in prison as an expression of support, and that he recognized her from her appearances on a television series. After everyone banters about whether Henry and/or Charlotte should join the committee, Henry loses his temper when Max uses inappropriate grammar. Max, in turn, loses his temper, saying that Brodie is living a fuller and better life than Henry - even though Brodie is not an intellectual, he actually believes in something. Max apologizes to Charlotte for losing his temper and goes out. Charlotte walks Max to the door. Alone with Henry, Annie suddenly tells him to leave early to pick up Debbie, indicating that she wants to meet him instead of going to the Brodie Committee meeting.

Act 1, Scene 2 Analysis

The action of this long and complex scene is anchored in the undercurrents of feeling playing out among the four characters. These include Annie's attraction to and frustration with Henry, Henry's attraction to Annie and his reluctance to act on it, the mutually growing resentment between Charlotte and Henry, and Max's helpless and admiring love for Annie. The business with the vegetables and dip provides a vehicle for the expression of many of these undercurrents, triggering opportunities for Henry and Charlotte to express their resentment, Annie to express her desire, and Max (through accidentally cutting himself) to subconsciously express his vulnerability. In fact, his injury metaphorically foreshadows the emotional wound he experiences in the following scene when Annie leaves him.

All that being said, the fact that the characters often express themselves through the medium of the dip instead of through words reinforces the idea, manifested most obviously in the bantering dialogue, that what's truly being felt is being suppressed. This is particularly true of Henry, somewhat less so of Charlotte, and still less so of Max, who at the end of the scene has a flash of genuine, unguarded anger. It's important to note the suppression going on with the characters; although, it is rarely true of Annie, who is for this crowd exceptionally open. Her feelings in this scene and throughout the play are directly, vividly, and passionately expressed. There is little artifice or falseness about her - when she attempts it, it's clearly uncomfortable. This is a woman who lives what she feels. As such, she is a powerful contrast and antagonist to Henry, who starts the play living what he thinks and speaking what he constructs. He is transformed by Annie into someone at least a little more open to revealing himself and his feelings. Through their relationship, he becomes more fully human, more real - his love, his very being, becomes "the real thing."

Two things seem real to Henry at this point in the play - his love of pop music, and his love for words and his determination to have them used correctly and with meaning. Throughout the play, his defense of pop, which everyone else in the play regards as superficial, is passionate and cleverly argued. In a similar vein, his moments of truest, purest anger come when he's confronted with people (Max in this scene, Brodie later in the play) who don't use words and language properly. In spite of his apparent passion on these subjects, however, other characters, particularly Annie, question whether the passion is truly, deeply felt. Henry thinks it is - his defense of both pop music and words is both constant and consistent. His journey of transformation, however, leads him to realize the superficiality of all the so-called passions he has at the beginning of the play - for pop, for words, and even for Annie.

There are other elements of foreshadowing in this scene aside from the previously mentioned metaphorical foreshadowing of Max's knife wound. These include the reference to Brodie, who plays an increasingly important key role in the action throughout the play and who finally appears in the last scene. Also, the appearance of the dip here foreshadows the appearance of another dip in the last scene, where it, too, represents suppressed feeling. Finally, Charlotte's comment about how Henry would react if he found out she is having an affair foreshadows Henry's barely controlled but still witty reaction to news of Annie's affair in Act 2.

Act 1, Scene 3

Act 1, Scene 3 Summary

Stage directions indicate that the setting is similar to that of Act 1 Scene 1, down to Max sitting at a coffee table, and Annie coming in from outside (the same way Charlotte did). Their conversation takes place against the background of Henry's appearance on *Desert Island Discs*, which Annie tries to listen to but which Max repeatedly turns down. Max confronts Annie with a bloody handkerchief, which he says is Henry's, telling Annie when Annie tells Max to give it back that Max already did give it back (as seen in Act 1 Scene 2) and that Max found it in Annie's car. He calls her names and starts to weep, asking whether she's having an affair. Annie confesses that she is, adding that she loves Henry and that Henry loves her, too. Max kicks the radio, which is still broadcasting Henry's program, across the room. He violently embraces Annie, whose arms remain at her sides and whose face remains blank.

Act 1, Scene 3 Analysis

This is the second of three occasions on which the basic "infidelity confrontation" scene (husband waiting, wife comes home, confrontation about adultery) plays out. The first is Act 1 Scene 1 (Max and Charlotte performing a scene from Henry's play), while the third is Act 2 Scene 9 (Henry confronting Annie about her affair with a young actor). The repetition functions on three main levels. The first is to raise the (perhaps clichy) question of whether art (Henry's play) imitates life or vice versa. The second is to suggest that what goes around comes around - Henry cheated on Charlotte, so Annie's cheating on Henry with the young actor is perhaps poetic justice. The third, and perhaps most important level, is the way each scene explores a different way of dealing with feelings aroused by the situation.

The version in Act 1 Scene 1, deals with the reality in a superficial, witty way, setting up developments in Act 1 Scene 2, that suggest that Henry, the creator of this version of the scene, is as superficial and witty in life as he is in his art. Act 1, Scene 3's version of the scene goes in exactly the opposite direction, into what some might describe as Max's excess of emotion. The third time the scene is replayed finds Henry's habitual wit struggling with his awakening feelings for dominance. In short, all three scenes represent elements in Henry's journey of transformation from superficial wittiness through powerful emotion to finding a balance, even though he only appears and/or participates directly in the scene when he confronts Annie about her affair with the young actor.

The fact that Max's discovery of Annie's infidelity is triggered by a handkerchief awakens echoes of Shakespeare's play *Othello*, in which the play's title character is awakened to murderous jealousy by the discovery of his wife's apparent affair, a discovery also triggered by a handkerchief. Because the tragedy of *Othello* is built

around jealousy, its echoes here are the first stages in the development of one of the secondary themes of *The Real Thing*, exploring the reasons for and nature of jealousy.

Act 1, Scene 4

Act 1, Scene 4 Summary

Stage directions indicate that the configuration of the set, in terms of doors and furniture, is similar to that of Act 1 Scene 2. The main difference between the two scenes is that this room is generally quite untidy, filled with boxes and stacks of paper. Henry sits at a desk working as Annie comes in, sees he's working, and promises to be quiet. She sits and reads a newspaper. There is the sense, never explicitly defined in the text that they're now living together. This sense is reinforced by the way she watches over his shoulder as he works, the way he grabs her with playful sexuality and the way Annie talks about being so happy that she doesn't feel guilty about the pain she's caused Max by leaving him. She and Henry banter about having gone to bed separately and without making love for the first time in more than two weeks, a conversation that results in Annie playfully promising to punish Henry by learning her lines instead of talking with him. Henry works with her, explaining that the project he's working on doesn't seem to be coming easily and admitting that writing about love is never easy for him. Their conversation about how to express love onstage leads Annie to comment on her feelings of attraction towards an actor with whom she's working, which leads Henry to attempt to seduce her away from her work, which leads Annie to comment on how he always gets upset when he gets taken away from his work. He wittily challenges her, but she tires of his banter and goes back to her script.

Henry then says he's got to go pick up Debbie and invites Annie along. Annie says her being there makes Henry nervous and spoils his time with his daughter. Their conversation reveals Annie is visiting Brodie in prison that day. Henry makes sarcastic comments about Brodie, leading Annie to an eruption of temper in which she accuses Henry of not loving her as well or as much as she loves him, and also of not being jealous of her flirtation with her fellow actor. Henry admits she's right, but says he's not jealous because he's secure in his and Annie's love. This calms Annie down; they kiss, then Henry goes to meet Debbie, while Annie sits on the floor, looking through papers.

Act 1, Scene 4 Analysis

The purpose of the deliberate echoes of the set for Act 1 Scene 2 might simply be to create the immediate sense that Henry is again in a domestic relationship. It's also possible, however, that the meaning of the similarity is deeper - that his domestic relationship with Annie is, in its own way, and in spite of their evident passion for each other, as superficial and as troubled as Henry's was with Charlotte. This idea is supported by the apparent tension that exists between Annie's passionately emotional openness and Henry's wit-oriented closed-ness. This tension manifests in Annie's accusation of a lack of jealousy on Henry's part and which continues to manifest throughout the play.

On another level, the reference to jealousy continues to develop the play's secondary theme introduced by the handkerchief, a perhaps somewhat obscure, Othello reference in the previous scene. As the action of the play reveals, for Annie, jealousy is proof of love, while for Henry, jealousy is proof of a lack of love. These opposite perspectives play a defining role in the conflict of the second act, in which Annie pursues an affair in an apparent attempt to force Henry to be jealous, and thereby reassure her of his love for her.

All that being said, their reconciliation here is the climax of the act. Henry is the play's central character, and given that his journey of transformation (from witty intellectual to feeling human being) is the play's core journey, his honest expression of love at this moment is a high point for both him and the play, propelling the action and conflict further into the complications and misunderstandings of the second act. In the middle of all this, the reference to Brodie keeps him alive in the audience's minds, and again foreshadows his role as a catalyst for Annie and Henry's eventual emotional union in the final scene of the play.

Act 2, Scene 5

Act 2, Scene 5 Summary

This act is set two years later, as indicated by slight changes in Henry's and Annie's appearances and by the fact that the action takes place in an entirely new setting - their home. Henry sits reading a manuscript and listening to classical music as Annie comes in. They banter about the composer of the music and about how Henry still prefers pop. Annie quickly becomes annoyed while Henry obliviously chatters on about the similarities between Beethoven, the Big Bopper and Buddy Holly. Annie finally and pointedly reminds him that he's supposed to be reading the manuscript, and Henry turns his attention back to the papers in his hand. They banter about whether Annie's interest in the script is professional or personal, whether she's the right age to play the female lead role, and whether Henry will be coming with her to Scotland while she's in rehearsal for another play.

As he and Annie argue, Henry reads a portion of the script out loud using so little expression that Annie has to insist that he do better. After a few more lines Henry has to stop, challenging Annie's decision to do it by saying it's not a literary play. This leads to an argument about the merits of the play, which, it's now revealed, was written by Brodie. Annie insists the play is worthwhile because Brodie has something to say, while Henry insists that it's essential that people with something to say have the ability to say it well, an ability Henry says Brodie lacks. Annie angrily calls him a snob, explains that the play was the committee's idea since its efforts to free Brodie from prison seem to have stalled, and that the head of the committee is prepared to produce the play no matter what. She goes on to suggest that Henry is jealously protective of his ideal of what a writer should be and do, adding that while he resents Brodie for being unable to write, Brodie resents him for not having anything to say.

Henry fetches a cricket bat, explaining that his writing is like the bat, designed and shaped with care to function well. He then says this is opposite to Brodie's writing, which he likens to a wooden club, not designed and not shaped and therefore barely able to function at all. Annie asks Henry to help Brodie rewrite it but he says he can't, talking about how empty Brodie's ideas and expressions of emotions are and how ultimately they'll both be unhappy with the results if Henry did. Annie pulls out what Henry had been writing and reads it out loud, revealing that he's been working on a cheap and cheesy science fiction television script. Henry says that's not the same thing, explaining that he's writing to pay the bills, since he has to support Charlotte who has yet to marry the architect she's living with. He then admits how depressed he is and says he'll come to Scotland and use Annie as inspiration. Annie says she's not going, vowing to stay home and get Brodie's play up. Completely frustrated, Henry asks Annie whether she "fancies" (desires) Brodie. The look she gives him tells him he's made a mistake and he tries to take his suggestion back. Annie tells him it's too late.

Act 2, Scene 5 Analysis

The arguments between Henry and Annie about music and writing indicate that perhaps Henry's movement towards true feeling isn't as far along as the end of Act 1 might have suggested. Yes, he's listening to classical music but relates to it in terms of pop. Yes, he's reading Brodie's play but relates to it in terms of the way he (Henry) believes words should be used. The suggestion here is that Henry is, on some level, fearful and suspicious of anything that challenges his two areas of safe, familiar passion - that he's scared, in fact, of anything deeper. If this is the case, it means that Annie's anger at him is based less on her resentment of his patronizing attitude to both classical music and to Brodie than on her belief that his attitudes in general represent his attitude to her. In other words, it seems that for Annie, Henry's denial that Beethoven's passion and Brodie's passion have any value suggests that he is also denying his own passion for Annie. This reinforces her fear, hinted at in Act 2 Scene 4 in the conversation about jealousy, that he doesn't really love her.

The play's secondary theme examining the nature of jealousy is developed in a different way here, as Annie suggests that Henry is professionally jealous of Brodie's work. Jealousy in all its manifestations (at least according to the play) seems to be a very narrowing kind of feeling, restricting openness and respect to only that which the person suffering from jealousy finds important. This is the kind of jealousy Henry exhibits here. By patronizing Brodie and dismissing Beethoven, he is arrogantly suggesting that only his perspective has any value. There is no respect, no understanding, and no willingness to understand - Annie's absolutely right. As one result of Annie's eventual affair with Billy, however, Henry is forced into a broader perspective of love and feeling, which, in turn, forces him into a similarly broader perspective on music and creativity. As a result of this process, jealousy, or more accurately the breaking down of jealousy, becomes a manifestation of the main theme of the play within the play. Once jealousy has been overcome, there is more freedom for "the real thing" to be thoroughly and effectively experienced.

The previously-discussed technique of repeating the structure of a scene several times is itself repeated throughout the remainder of the play by using the material from Brodie's play quoted by Henry in the beginning of this scene. The first instance of repetition is in the following scene.

Act 2, Scene 6

Act 2, Scene 6 Summary

Annie sits on a moving train, reading. A young man with a Scottish accent approaches her and speaks the first few lines of dialogue from the scene read by Henry in Act 2 Scene 5. This startles Annie, leading the young man, Billy, to stop quoting the lines, drop the accent, and explain that he just happens to be on the same train. Conversation reveals that Billy and Annie are on their way to Scotland (the trip Annie said earlier she wasn't going to take) to appear in the same play. Conversation also reveals that Billy thinks Brodie can't write, that Annie actually agrees, and that Annie thinks Billy might be a good actor to play the character in the play based on Brodie. Finally, conversation reveals that ever since they met, Billy's been attracted to Annie, that he actually took the train in order to sit with her, and that he'll do Brodie's play if she does it. Annie tells him firmly that he's not going to get anywhere with her. This leads Billy to quote flirtatious dialogue from the play in which he and Annie are about to appear. Annie joins in, but Billy soon gets carried away and Annie laughingly has to ask him to stop.

Act 2, Scene 6 Analysis

The essential structure of the meeting scene in Brodie's play, first quoted in Act 2 Scene 5, is repeated here for the first time. The reasons for such repetition are similar for this second repeated scene (the "potential lovers" scene) as they are for the first repeated scene (the "infidelity confrontation" scene). The first of these reasons is to raise the question in the minds of the characters and the audience alike of whether art is imitating life or vice versa. The second reason is to make the suggestion that what goes around comes around. In this case, the idea might be that because Henry cheated on Charlotte, it is poetic justice that Henry is eventually cheated on by Annie, a sequence of events set in motion by Annie's encounter with Billy on the train.

The third reason for repeating the two sequences is also similar for both. In the same way that each repetition of the "infidelity confrontation" scene takes Henry closer to discovering "the real thing," i.e., the truth and depth of his love for Annie, the repetition of the "potential lovers" scene takes Annie closer to discovering her real thing. For her that "real thing" is Henry's love, and her ability to trust both in it and him, rather than striving so hard to create jealousy in him as proof of his love. Over the course of the act, she realizes she doesn't have to do that to feel loved, and to believe Henry loves her. That, however, comes later. For now, the scene puts her on the road to a dilemma, a situation that draws the audience further into the story - will she have sex with this attractive, charming young man or not? Will Henry find out - will there be another repetition of the "infidelity confrontation"?

Once again, the reference to Brodie and his play keeps Brodie alive in the audience's mind, and once again foreshadows his appearance in the final scene of the play, where

he acts as a catalyst for a realization and reconciliation for Henry and Annie. There may be, in fact, another level of meaning to the meeting between Billy and Annie here. Because Billy is about to play Brodie and because there's sexual attraction between him and Annie, (which Annie doesn't yet acknowledge but which will lead to their eventual affair), it's possible to see that there might be something to Henry's question about whether Annie fancies Brodie. Perhaps she really does, with the relationship between Annie and Billy (the pseudo-Brodie, for lack of a better phrase) serving as a substitute for the relationship Annie, in fact, wants to have with the real Brodie.

Act 2, Scene 7

Act 2, Scene 7 Summary

This scene is set in the living room where Act 1 Scene 2 is set. As Henry and Debbie discuss Debbie's smoking habit, Henry corrects Debbie's grammar. Charlotte is nearby, looking through some files and occasionally joining in the banter as Henry and Debbie discuss when and how Debbie lost her virginity. For a moment Charlotte goes off on a tangent as she gives up trying to figure out who played opposite her in a years-ago production of the same play in which Annie and Billy are appearing in Scotland. Henry tells Charlotte to concentrate, since they're meant to be discussing a family crisis - Debbie going traveling with a young man. Charlotte calmly goes off to have a bath, telling Debbie that if her young man comes she wants to talk to them before they leave.

Henry and Debbie make small talk about Annie being in Glasgow, banter about the nature of happiness, about whether Debbie should call her parents Ma and Pa or by their first names, and about whether *House of Cards* has any meaning or depth beyond the question of whether Charlotte's character had an affair. This leads Debbie into a long speech in which she refers to her childhood belief that sex was a great mystery and what a shock her adult discovery was that sex was everywhere. She's clearly her father's daughter, using words as cleverly as Henry does, but Henry tells her she shouldn't get too involved in such wordplay. When Henry starts in on similar wordplay, Debbie tells him to just talk, not write out loud. This leads Henry into a disjointed, free-associative and evocative description of how love feels to him. He concludes by describing it as pain, which leads Debbie to ask whether Annie is involved with someone else. Henry says that as far as he knows, she isn't. The doorbell rings, and Debbie asks Henry not to come out to meet her boyfriend, saying he's frightened of Henry.

Charlotte comes in with a handful of pre-stamped and pre-addressed postcards for Debbie to send when she's away. Debbie kisses Henry goodbye and goes out. After seeing Debbie off, Charlotte asks how Annie is doing and who she's acting opposite, registering surprise when Henry says he doesn't know and that he's not jealous. This leads Charlotte to comment on how she thought, when they were together, that he didn't care whether she had an affair or not. This in turn leads Henry to ask how many she had, and she admits to nine, teasing him affectionately about feeling betrayed and calling him an "idiot" for not being more obviously caring. Henry asks how things are with the architect, Charlotte tells him she broke up with him because of his jealousy. They banter about what she should have said when she ended the relationship, they toast each other, and then tease each other about maybe having one last sexual fling. This leads Henry to comment that he'd rather be the kind of "idiot" Charlotte describes, saying that believing such things makes him romantic and he'd prefer to always be romantic.

Act 2, Scene 7 Analysis

The key point of this scene can be found in Henry's lengthy speech to Debbie about love, the first point in the play when Henry totally and genuinely drops his superficiality and wittiness to simply express how he feels. This is another turning point in the action, as Henry acts with a sense of honesty and integrity that carries him through the rest of the action. As the result of this conversation, for example, he's able to admit the truth of how he feels about love to Charlotte at the end of the scene, and stand up to Annie's demands that he be jealous later in the play.

Those demands are foreshadowed by Charlotte's pointed comments in this scene about Henry's apparent lack of jealousy during their marriage, a development in the play's key secondary theme relating to the nature and value of jealousy. The irony, of course, is that Charlotte leaves her architect because he's too jealous. Is it likely that Charlotte will ever be satisfied? Probably not, but that's not the point. The point is that Henry is coming to realize, as the result of the manipulations of the women in his life, that he loves too purely to be jealous. It's becoming clear that his wit and cleverness are a mask, that he uses words as protection so no-one can see how vulnerable he is.

Act 2, Scenes 8 and 9

Act 2, Scenes 8 and 9 Summary

Scene 8 - Billy and Annie rehearse a love scene from their play. Their simulated intensity quickly becomes real, and they kiss passionately.

Scene 9 - This scene has a deliberately similar feel to Act 1 Scene 1 and Act 1 Scene 3, the two previous "infidelity confrontation" scenes. Henry sits alone, waiting. Annie comes in. He asks increasingly-pointed questions about why she's late, explaining that he called her hotel and learned she'd checked out a day early. Annie discovers that their bedroom's been searched and for a moment believes they've been burgled, but soon realizes it was Henry doing the searching. Henry asks whether the train was late; Annie tells him to stop humiliating himself and explains that she traveled with a member of the company. They had breakfast at the train station and lost track of the time. To keep Annie from going out to tidy the bedroom, Henry asks whether she was with Billy, referring to how she keeps talking about him. Annie comments that Henry should have put everything in the bedroom back where it belongs, saying "everything would be the way it was."

There is another layer to this comment - she's also asking Henry to put his faith in her and their love together back the way it was. Henry responds to this level of commentary, saying that things can't be put back the way they were. He asks again whether she's involved with Billy, and she admits she is. She and Henry then profess their love for each other, leading into an argument about which of them would want to know more details about the other's affairs. Annie accuses Henry of being more interested in punishing himself than in caring about her. Henry proclaims that he doesn't believe in leaving things unsaid. "I believe in mess, tears, pain, self-abasement, loss of self-respect, nakedness." Annie urges Henry to find a part of himself where she isn't important, saying the humiliation and pain he causes himself by caring so much hurts her because she loves him. Henry asks what Billy thinks of Brodie's play. Annie tells him Billy said Brodie can't write.

Act 2, Scenes 8 and 9 Analysis

Henry's passionate declaration of his belief in mess, etc. is the climax of his journey of transformation. Here he reveals the depth and truth of his feelings, the "real thing" at the core of his newly-expanded sense of self. He is, in essence, challenging the emotionally-demanding Annie to love him as he is, not as she wants and needs him to be. This is clearly difficult for Annie to accept, deflecting his offer as she does by telling him not to care so much. The action of the rest of the play is anchored by her struggles to face this challenge, to face herself, and to find her real thing.

Annie's exit comment about Billy thinking Brodie can't write is a kind of peace offering to Henry. By telling him someone agrees with him, she's saying that in spite of their argument earlier over the merits of Brodie's play, she recognizes that Henry knows what he's talking about and that he's not a complete fool. The implication at this point is that in spite of what Annie just said, she actually doesn't think he's a fool for loving her as he does. The unspoken point here is that she isn't yet able to fully accept Henry's extremely passionate love, a challenge she faces in the rest of the play, particularly in the following two scenes.

Act 2, Scenes 10 and 11

Act 2, Scenes 10 and 11 Summary

These scenes portray the confusion the once-confident and expressive Annie feels as the result of Henry's startling, passionate confession in Act 2 Scene 9.

Scene 10 - In an image and structure similar to that of Act 2 Scene 6, Annie sits reading on a moving train. Billy approaches, speaking with a Scottish accent. They speak dialogue similar to the dialogue read by Henry in Act 2 Scene 5, but which also seems re-written. This idea is reinforced by the fact that Billy makes a mistake and is corrected by Annie, who comments that the line he said is from an earlier script. The scene stops, and a shift in lighting reveals that Annie and Billy are in fact on a film set. Annie moves away, and it seems there is once again emotional and sexual distance between then.

Scene 11 - In the apartment he shares with Annie, Henry listens to classical music on the radio, a fact Annie happily comments on as she hurries out the door. Her happiness isn't diminished by Henry's comparing the music to that of a famous pop group. Conversation reveals that it's the last day of shooting on the Brodie film, and that Henry ghost-wrote it (contributed to the script without credit). Annie starts to leave but is pulled back by a phone call from Billy. Annie sees Henry is hurt by her ongoing affair and offers to stop, but Henry tells her not to stop for him, adding that he can't find a part of himself where she's not important - everything he does and is and writes is for her and because of her and filled with her. This leads Annie to speak with frustrated and confused incoherence about how she doesn't really understand what happened between her and Billy but that it nevertheless means something to her, and she can't stop, even though it means less than she thought and she feels silly.

Henry takes a phone call from the producer of the Brodie film, and tells the producer that Annie's on her way. Annie takes the phone and shouts at the producer, then hangs up and tells Henry she needs him, expressing her hope that what's happening won't damage his love for her. He assures her that his love will either stay as it is or become utter hate. When he asks when she'll be back, she says she won't be late and leaves. Henry finds the recording of the pop group to which he compared the classical music at the beginning of the scene, and soon collapses into pleading for Annie to not continue with the affair.

Act 2, Scenes 10 and 11 Analysis

As previously discussed, the repetition of the "potential lovers" scene in Scene 10 serves to take Annie closer to connection with "the real thing" at the core of her relationship with Henry. This movement in her character is not without conflict, however. The conclusion of the scene, and perhaps even the playing of it, shows how the attraction to Billy is fading, but the confrontation in Scene 11 indicates how profoundly

she's struggling with herself. The once confident and outspoken Annie has clearly become unnerved by Henry's confession, passion and vulnerability (Act 2 Scene 9). She's been confronted with the same kind of honesty with which she confronts others, faced with unreserved, unconditional love free of the jealousy that for her seems to have previously defined love. The following final scene of the play reveals her truest, deepest reaction to that love, the "real thing" at the core of her experience of feeling.

That core is, for the moment, at least partially obscured by her lingering feelings for Billy. What's the attraction? She's failed in her attempt to make Henry jealous, so there's obviously something else going on. Perhaps in part it's an attraction to the fearlessness represented and embodied by the character Billy is playing - Brodie. In other words, is she attracted to Billy or what he represents? This is another manifestation of the play's questioning of what's real and what isn't. There is no clear answer provided in the text, and that's part of the play's point. The truth is a blurry, subjective, often less than a fully definable thing.

For his part, Henry's honesty continues to deepen. This is indicated through his admitting there is no part of him that is not connected to her, and through his desperate plea at the end of the act. It's important to note that Annie doesn't hear this plea, but that's all right - in terms of Henry's journey of transformation, it's more important for him to both feel his feelings fully and express them than it is for Annie to hear them.

Act 2, Scene 12

Act 2, Scene 12 Summary

The last few minutes of the Brodie film are heard - Billy and Annie, in character as Brodie and his lover, say their final goodbyes. Lights come up on the hotel room where the real Brodie is watching the film. Henry comes in; they make small talk about the resale value of stolen VCR's (Brodie was apparently watching the film on tape) and about how Annie has aged a bit since her days on the previously-discussed television series (last mentioned in Act 1 Scene 2).

Annie comes in with appetizers and a dip, listening as Brodie comments that he liked the script better before Henry rewrote it. Annie comments that the film worked. Brodie assumes Annie means that it got him out of prison. Annie says that isn't what she meant, and Brodie says that what she meant doesn't matter - the film had nothing at all to do with getting him out. He goes into extensive detail about how he's out because of politics. He then makes further caustic comments on the rewritten script, saying it probably needed something to fit in with the broadcaster's prejudices. Henry makes pointed comments about how those "prejudices" include a taste for good drama. Brodie tells Henry to stop being clever and just admit that Henry did what he did to the script for Annie, and Annie talks about how neither this angry Brodie nor the Brodie in the script is the real Brodie. She talks at length about how vulnerable and determined Brodie was when they met, and it becomes clear that the scene on the train was based on a real meeting - between Brodie and Annie.

Annie's story leads Henry to comment that if she'd told it to him in the first place, he would have known how to write it. Brodie reminds them he's still in the room, and Annie urges him to finish his drink and go. Brodie makes a sneering comment about her dip. She throws it in his face, and then as he silently wipes it off, goes and opens the door for him. Brodie comments on how he understands Henry completely, saying he was as attracted to Annie when she visited him in prison as Henry must be to have worked on the script for her. He says that realizing he was unable to have her was the first time he felt he was really in prison, and hints that Henry knows what that means. He then goes.

Henry admits that what just happened frightened him. He and Annie reassure each other that they're all right, but before they can talk further they're interrupted by a phone call from Max, who announces that he's getting married. Annie indicates she doesn't want to talk to him, but Henry tells her that if he hadn't taken her from him, Max would never have met the woman he now happily loves. As Henry goes back to the conversation with Max, Annie turns out the lights, leaving only the ones in the bedroom lit. Henry asks Max whether he agrees that love is wonderful. Henry becomes distracted by Annie, who is going into the bedroom, but is recalled back to the conversation with Max, responding to his (unheard) question by saying "Yes, I'm still here."

Act 2, Scene 12 Analysis

The dialogue at the beginning of this scene functions on several levels. The first is to indicate that the production of Brodie's play for television has gone ahead. The second is to suggest that Billy and Annie have said their goodbyes - it's their voices being heard; it's therefore not too much of a stretch to suggest that their real-life farewell had a similar tone and quality. The third level of function is to foreshadow Annie's ultimate farewell to Brodie and to his influence on her life and relationship, that takes place later in this scene. A possible fourth layer of function can be found in the fact that it's the end of the the television play - the ending here of the invented, shaped, wittily re-written truth represents the ending of Henry's invented, shaped, wittily-written life.

As is the case when a snack dip first appeared (Act 1 Scene 2), the dip here symbolizes expressions of feeling. But while the subtle passing of the dip in that earlier scene represents the necessarily subtle expressions of feeling between Henry and Annie, whose affair was at that point clandestine, the throwing of the dip on Brodie in this scene represents Annie's explosion of feeling and her determination to get all influences of Brodie out of her life. It can also be seen as a determined and defiant acceptance of everything Henry has been saying all along about Brodie's lack of depth, and, by extension, an acceptance of everything else Henry has said about passion, about the meaning of having no jealousy, and about the messiness of love. Annie here creates a literal mess in defense of the "real" love she and Henry feel for each other, the love that led Henry to work on a project he despises because it is important to Annie.

The thematically central question of what's real and what isn't appears again in Annie's comments about the "real" Brodie. The suggestion here is that Annie has become aware that her idea of Brodie was based on an assumption or false belief. This parallels her recently-acquired awareness that her idea of love was also based on an assumption, and therefore wasn't real in the way this Brodie isn't real. She has discovered love isn't defined by jealousy, in the same way as Brodie isn't, apparently, defined by anything but boorish self-interest.

Brodie's comments about knowing how Henry feels about Annie, particularly the comment about seeing her and knowing he's in prison, are a negative spin to Henry's earlier more positive and romantic comments about his love for Annie. Essentially, Henry is trapped by his love for her and by what he believes about how love should be expressed. He, in effect, is in prison - just the way Brodie suggests he is. But does Henry mind? Not a bit. Does Annie? Not any more. They've both, finally and fully, found their way to living and accepting and embracing the "real thing" at the core of their relationship ... their genuine, mysterious, deeply felt, wonderful connection.

As with many other lines in the play, Henry's closing line to Max ("I'm still here") has more than one layer of meaning. The first is the more obvious one - he's still on the phone. A second and deeper meaning is that he's still with Annie, emotionally as well as physically. "I'm still here," he's essentially saying, "loving her and being me and being us with her." Their love has survived her affair, his refusal to give in to her need for

jealousy, and their mutual, painful journey into "the real thing" at the core of their lives, their hearts, and their art.

Characters

Annie

Annie is an actress who is married to Max but is conducting an affair with Henry. She urges Henry to come clean about the affair but is in fact the one who reveals it to Max. In Act II Annie lands the part of August Strindberg's *Miss Julie* in a Glaswegain production of that play and begins an adulterous affair with her co-star Billy.

Annie is politically idealistic, and dedicates herself to the campaign for Brodie's release. She encourages Brodie to write an autobiographical play, believing that it will renew support for the campaign. Brodie's play is so poorly written that Annie enlists Henry to re-write it, refusing, however, to admit to him that it is badly written. Henry at first refuses to cooperate with her but eventually capitulates. In the final scene, Annie turns against Brodie, smashing a bowl of dip into his face. At the same time she appears to give up her affair with Billy and to return to Henry.

Billy

Billy is a young actor who falls in love with Annie. He manages to sweep her off her feet with his enthusiasm and honesty, which she finds a refreshing contrast to Henry's tight-lipped expressions of love.

Brodie

The subject of much discussion and debate throughout the play, Brodie only appears onstage in the final scene. All of Annie's claims about his idealism are finally revealed to be false. When he set fire to the wreath of the Unknown Soldier, Brodie was not seeking to make a political statement; rather, he was seeking to impress Annie, who he had just met. He is also revealed to be ungrateful and chauvinistic.

Charlotte

Charlotte is the lead actress in Henry's new play, *House of Cards*. She is also Henry's wife. Charlotte and Henry do not have a happy relationship. Henry's irony seems to have alienated Charlotte; moreover, she criticizes his writing, complaining that he does not write good female characters. Charlotte is offstage for most of the play but reappears in a crucial scene between Henry and Debbie, during which she reveals to him that she had nine affairs while married to him. More important than the fact of her adultery, however, is her statement on commitment and marriage that she delivers in the same scene.

Debbie

Debbie is Henry and Charlotte's daughter. She appears in the second act, a world-wise seventeen-year-old who has a conversation with her father about sex and love. She claims that sex is not a mystery and that it does not deserve the hyperbole it attracts. Her father admires her skill with words but disagrees with her argument and labels her a sophist. Debbie's pragmatic comments represent a younger generation's view of sex and love.

Henry

Henry, a successful London playwright, is the play's protagonist. Henry is married to Charlotte, the lead actress in his current play *House of Cards*. However, he is estranged from his wife and is having an affair with Annie. Henry and Annie leave their respective spouses and embark on a life together. But when the new couple disagree about Brodie's play, and when Henry learns that Annie is being unfaithful, their relationship is threatened.

Henry's verbal dexterity lands him in trouble as often as it launches him into success. For all his wit and humor, he can be bitingly sarcastic and blisteringly rude; he is also impatient with other people's flawed logic and imprecise expression. Henry is apt to speak as if he was a character in a play, a characteristic that cripples his expression of emotion. He is most eloquent when articulating his belief in the innocence of language and when defending his conception of literature.

Henry undergoes profound change in the course of the play. He is finally able to express love and passion in real language, and his understanding of love also changes.

Max

Max is the lead actor in Henry's new play, *House of Cards*. In *House of Cards* he plays an architect who discovers that his wife is having an adulterous affair. Offstage, Max is Annie's husband.

In the third and last scene in which he appears onstage, Max reenacts his character's discovery of adultery in *House of Cards*, confronting Annie about her affair with Henry. He later tries, unsuccessfully, to win her back with flowers and telephone calls. In the play's final scene, it is revealed that he is in love again and is about to remarry. His joy in his new found love contrasts ironically to Henry's sobered love for Annie.

Themes

Real Life vs. Art

The title of *The Real Thing* and its subject matter appear to lay bare Stoppard's particular preoccupation in this play: he is characteristically investigating an ethical issue (adultery) and questioning its philosophical partner, the nature of true love. As Richard Corliss stated in a review in *Time, " The Real Thing* announces itself as just that: a real, straightforward play about matters of the heart." These are the central preoccupations of *The Real Thing*, but Stoppard's investigation of these issues is broad enough to sweep other topics under his microscope: he also explores the nature of reality and perception.

The play's title describes, firstly, the protagonists' search for "real love." Henry, for all his sarcasm and irony, is at heart an idealist and a romantic, and when he says "I do" he means it. But he does not allow for the presence of doubt and insecurity in his loved one's heart and, consequently, does not provide the reassurance that his partners crave. To him, such gestures and words are unnecessary, he sees the desire for them as irrational and incomprehensible. Real love simply exists, it needs no artifice to prop it up.

Henry climbs a learning curve in love when he realizes that the fictions created by the imagination, however false, nonetheless impact the real experience of love and adultery. Love may be "knowing and being known," but that knowledge depends upon curbing the imagination's sometimes crippling powers of speculation, doubt, and suspicion. As Jack Kroll argued in Newsweek: "For Stoppard, the most human urgency is the need to know, and the highest comedy is the breakdown of this process in an epic bewilderment."

Deepening the central exploration of Henry's changing understanding of love is Stoppard's exploration of the nature of reality itself. Stoppard unhinges the audience's uncertainty about what is real and fictional in the first two scenes of the play: "real life" and representations of real life collapse in the contrast between *House of Cards*, the play-within-a-play, and the "real" play, *The Real Thing*. The distinction between reality and art appears to unravel further when Stoppard mixes extracts from plays by his own fictional character Brodie with those by real playwrights John Ford and August Strindberg. These extracts blur the boundaries between reality and art by establishing closer connections between each realm. The extract from *House of Cards*, for instance, alerts the audience to the impending collapse of Henry and Charlotte's marriage, while the extract from Strindberg's Miss Julie signals to them that Annie's affair, like *Miss Julie's*, degrades her.

This blurring of reality and art is intensified by the characters' occupations: they are all paid to create fictions, either onstage or on the page. Charlotte, Max, and Annie are consummate actors, and Annie in particular uses her talents in everyday life, concealing

her adultery from Max and then Henry. In a different way, too, Charlotte is aware of the carry-over from her profession into her private life: when Max appears at her home, she complains playfully, "Don't I get a day off?" then later, more seriously, complains that she's the "victim" of Henry's "fantasy." Henry, of course, is the consummate blurrer of real life and art: he fantasizes in stage dialogue about the possibility of his wife having an affair, but, just as he cannot imagine that possibility in real life, so too in *House of Cards* the imagined affair is revealed to have not taken place. As Charlotte says, "if Henry caught me out with a lover ... his sentence structure would go to pot, closely followed by his sphincter."

Reality, however unpleasant, invariably catches up with those who ignore it, and this is precisely what happens to Henry: art is no longer the receptacle of impossible imaginings but rather the mirror that reflects reality. Stoppard's repetition of certain scenes (Act I, scenes 1 and 3; Act II, scene 5) suggests that life can imitate art in uncanny ways, and confirms, in the play's structure, the overarching theme of Henry's painful realization that art and reality cannot be kept separate from each other.

Language and Meaning

Stoppard believes that language and meaning are open to interpretation. Words in themselves are "innocent," but they can have dangerous effects. Both Charlotte and Annie find Henry's incessant word-play oppressive at times, particularly when he becomes sarcastic. His tendency to rely upon irony and sarcasm becomes a mis-use of language when he uses these registers of humor to contain emotion and to create emotional distance a habit that is exposed by Henry's daughter. Henry's "growth" in the play hinges upon finally being able to express emotions in the everyday language of the heart. As Frank Rich said in the *New York Times*, Henry struggles to "find the language that celebrates love."

Despite the primary focus on matters of the heart, the sub-plot about Brodie's play constitutes the most significant discussion of language and meaning in the play. Stoppard begins this penultimate scene in Act II with an apparently frivolous discussion. Henry says that he cannot distinguish between different classical composers and prefers pop music to opera. Annie is horrified that he does not appreciate Beethoven, but she herself cannot distinguish between the Everly Brothers and the Andrews Sisters. This seemingly inconsequential discussion is actually very telling.

Henry's preference for pop music and Annie's preference for classical music are an ironic contrast to their beliefs about writing. Henry believes that words are sacred. They "build bridges across inomprehension and chaos" and "they deserve respect. " Annie, in contrast, is suspicious of attaching any literary or aesthetic value to language. She locates the value of language in its effect upon the world. However, her argument is undercut by the fact that she pleads with Henry to re-write Brodie's crude script. She recognizes, but will not admit, that writing must be well written if it is to have any social or political impact, if it has the power to, in Henry's words, "nudge the world a little."

By placing this discussion at centerstage, Stoppard encourages the audience to make up their own minds about an issue that was and still is very controversial. The audience have experienced the skill and power of Henry's writing and have listened to Henry and Annie's reading of Brodie's play. They can thus evaluate Henry and Annie's arguments. Should people distinguish between "good" and "bad" writing, and if so, how? They can also evaluate Henry and Brodie's *writing*. Which writer is more persuasive and which is more moving? Thus Stoppard intervenes in a controversial discussion about literature and politics while leaving the question unresolved and encouraging the audience to think through the issue themselves.

Style

Realism

The Real Thing marks a major departure in style for Stoppard: an abandonment of Absurdist styles for an exploration of Realist technique. Stoppard's move from Absurdism to Realism is apparent in the first scene, when Max speaks at length, and apparently without purpose, about the difference between Japanese and Swiss watches. It is a funny, albeit baffling, speech. A moment later, however, the audience realizes that the digression has real meaning. The "utterly reliable" Swiss watches are losing out to the "snare" and "delusion" of Japanese watches, just as solid, stable marriages are being replaced with no-strings-attached affairs.

Later, when Henry and Annie's embrace is interrupted by the impatient beeping of Henry's wrist-watch, Stoppard humorously reminds the audience of his earlier metaphor a thoroughly modern one for time's intrusion into love. It is a metaphor that melds modern context with eternal themes.

The characters are concerned with "real life" dramas, such as adultery, money, and family trouble, and the action takes place in living rooms and train carriages, not court yards and throne rooms. Just as the setting is realistic and contemporary, so too is the language. Henry's cricket bat speech, in Act II, scene 1, is a good example of Stoppard's attempt to show his audience the poetry and drama of everyday life in everyday language. "What we're trying to do is write cricket bats, so that we when throw up an idea and give it a little knock, it might ... travel...."

Perhaps Stoppard's departure from the chaos and incomprehensibility that is characteristic of Absurdism to the making sense of the everyday that is characteristic of Realism is best seen in the character of Henry. His dependence upon humor and word-play suggests that he is alienated from "real" language and incapable of expressing his emotions without being ironic.

This conundrum is most clear in a conversation Henry and Debbie have about love. "Well, I reember, the first time I succumbed to the sensation that the universe was dispensable minus one lady ." Debbie, interrupting, tells him that he should "speak" rather than "write": he should be serious rather than ironic, truthful rather than flippant. Unexpectedly, he responds from the heart. "What lovers trust each other with," he tells her, is "knowledge of each other ... knowledge of self, the real him, the real her, *in extremis*, the mask slipped from the face." Real language, *contemporary language*, can express universal dilemmas as eloquently as elevated Shakespearean verse can, and real life can be as powerful an experience as hyperbolic representations of it in art.

The Play-within-the-Play

In *The Real Thing*, Stoppard uses a favorite theatrical device, the play-within-a-play. His most notable and extensive use of this technique is evident in his landmark *Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead*, which centers around two minor characters in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and employs the classic as its backdrop (in this case Stoppard's play is actually the "play within" that is contained within the universe of Shakespeare's "play"). In *The Real Thing*, Stoppard carries this device to a new level. There are not one but four plays-within-the-play: Henry's *House of Cards*, a fictional play; John Ford's *Tis Pity She's A Whore*; August Strindberg' s *Miss Julie*; and Brodie's unnamed TV drama, another fictional play. Stoppard's use of them profoundly affects the play's meaning.

The device of the play-within-a-play works to trigger events in the play the "Mousetrap" in *Hamlet*, for instance or to comment satirically on events within the play the figures of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, for example. The device also allows the playwright to emphasize certain themes. The opening scene in *The Real Thing*, for instance, prefigures the revelation of Henry's adultery, the disintegration of his marriage, as well as his characteristic over-reliance on irony and wit to control his emotions.

The device of the play-within-a-play in *The Real Thing* has other functions, too, most noticeably the creation of ironic and humorous contrasts. The sophisticated bedroom drama *House of Cards*, and Brodie's crude TV play that book-end *The Real Thing* are qualitatively a gulf apart. Henry's language does not tell, it reveals: Henry's mind is analytic and subtle. Brodie's language not only tells, it hammers home the obvious and destroys any drama in the process: Brodie' s thinking is crude and simplistic. The plays demonstrates the difference between the two men's perception of the world and their vision of art. The dramatic works also create a clearer contrast between the two men to whom Annie devotes herself.

Additionally, much of the play's humor derives from the contrast between theatrical representations of life in *The Real Thing* (the extracts from *Miss Julie* and *House of Cards*) and Stoppard' s representation of real life in *The Real Thing*. In Act II, scene 2, Billy and Annie rehearse a love scene from '*Tis Pity She's A Whore*. Annie stops rehearsing when Billy becomes "less and less discreet," but he continues to read from the script. The contrast between her colloquial language and his elevated language, between him continuing to rehearse and her ceasing to, intensifies both the humor and the passion of the scene. The device of the play-within-the-play is thus central to the overall development of themes and characters.

Historical Context

Britain in the Early-1980s

In the 1970s Britain had been torn apart by industrial action and economic depression. Garbage men went on strike; milkmen went on strike; British Rail employees went on strike. Garbage piled up in the streets, milk was not delivered, and people could not rely upon the trains to arrive at work on time. Due to the OPEC boycott (a western abstention from the oil produced in the Middle East), the price of gas skyrocketed. Compounding all these problems was the undeniable fact that British industry was in decline.

Many of Britain's economic problems in the 1970s had their origins in the Postwar period. After the end of the Second World War, great sections of London had to be re-built and strict food and supply rationing continued well into the 1950s. Although money poured in to Britain to aid the economic recovery, the government channeled much of it into retaining control of the British colonies, the parts of its vast (though soon crumbling) empire. In the long-run, this was a disastrous decision. The British Empire gradually collapsed, and the home economy continued to flounder.

In 1979, after a period of immense social and political turmoil, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's conservative Tory party took power in Britain. Mrs.Thatcher promised to end social disruption and to improve industry profitability. The Tory party retained control of Britain for fifteen years and dramatically altered the fabric of British society.

In 1982, Britain and Argentina's dispute over the Falkland Islands, an obscure island group off the coast of Argentina, escalated into full-scale war. Britain's victory over Argentina seemed puny in the international scheme of things, but the war galvanized nostalgia for British imperial might and encouraged many people to feel, as Thatcher proclaimed, that "Great Britain is great again." Nonetheless, within Britain there was a small, vocal group of people who opposed the war.

In the same year, Prince Charles's wedding to Lady Diana Spencer provided the public with a fairy-tale spectacle that brought the monarchy's popularity to an unprecedented height.

However, not everyone was happy with the direction in which Britain was moving. The eighteen-month long coal-miners' strike in this same period brutally reminded both British and international observers that economic change had come at great social cost. Homelessness became common in Britain's major cities, and the low-cost housing estates in the inner-city that had been built in the Postwar period became notorious poverty traps. Racism, too, was a constant problem, as Britain struggled to integrate recent immigrants into a sometimes hostile society. The period in which Stoppard wrote *The Real Thing* was a mixed bag of goods and attitudes towards the tremendous social

and economic change depended very much upon whether one was benefiting or suffering as a result of them.

The British Artistic Tradition of Social Criticism

British artists have a venerable tradition of combining social criticism with artistic innovation, and many people who were unhappy in Thatcher's Britain looked to the theater and to film for critical representations of contemporary society. Film was a popular medium for the British artistic tradition of social criticism. Screenwriter Hanif Kureshi's film *My Beautiful Laundrette* laid bare the racist cancer at the heart of the inner-city, and Richard Attenborough's *Ghandhi* presented the Indian perspective on British colonialism and empire building.

In the dramatic realm, John Osborne protested against middle-class convention and brought workinglass characters onto the stage in his decade-defining drama, *Look Back in Anger* (1956). A decade later, Edward Bond, a working-class playwright, attracted enormous controversy with his play *Saved* (1965), a grim depiction of urban violence and social decay in which a baby is stoned to death in its pram. Harold Pinter, in plays such as *The Birthday Party* (1958) and *The Caretaker* (1960), chose not to speak the language of the people but to create his own rhetoric to express the fractured reality he perceived. Stoppard, too, contributed to the British tradition of social criticism with plays such as *Professional Foul* (1977), which is set in Czechoslovakia and focuses on political dissidents living in a totalitarian society, and *Night and Day* (1978), which takes place in a fictionalized Africa and examines the role of the press under a dictatorship.

However, at first glance, *The Real Thing* seems removed from contemporary controversy. But after a more thoughtful examination, it becomes clear that the play takes issue with two pressing social items. In his presentation of Henry and Annie's relationship, Stoppard touches upon the changing status of marriage, and in the sub-plot about Brodie's imprisonment, he attacks segments of the anti-war movement.

Attitudes towards divorce have changed greatly in the second half of the twentieth century. In the 1950s and early-1960s, it was a social taboo to divorce one's spouse. Times have changed, and the play's imagined "society" can accept Henry and Annie's decision to leave their respective spouses with a degree of understanding. But the price of such social change, Stoppard suggests, is that the post-divorce unions are frequently plagued by uncertainty and distrust.

The other important social issue Stoppard explores in *The Real Thing* is the British anti-war movement, which focused upon the presence of American bases on British soil and upon Britain's involvement in the manufacturing and sale of nuclear missiles. One of the most famous anti-war protests during this period was *the permanent* women-only demonstration outside the Greenam Common missile base. The women's movement and the antiwar movement often shared the same umbrella, and it is upon this loose alliance that Stoppard turns his rhetorical guns.

In *The Real Thing*, Annie is active in the antimissile movement. She meets Brodie, a soldier, when she is on her way to a demonstration. He tries to impress her by lighting a fire on the Cenotaph but is promptly arrested. Annie and Max interpret his action sympathetically: Brodie is "an ordinary soldier using his weekend pass to demonstrate against their bloody missiles." To them, the bases are reprehensible both because they demonstrate society's commitment to war and because they are evidence of American imperialism.

Henry does not agree. To him, Brodie is an ignorant, thoughtless "vandalizer of a national shrine," and his character and his "cause" is further damaged by his loutish stupidity and goggle-eyed leering at Annie. Stoppard paints Brodie in the most unsympathetic light. He also does an injustice to the movements that Annie espouses: her quick cancellation of a political appointment for sex with Henry, her championing of Brodie because of his infatuation with her, and her ill-conceived idealism, all suggest that her politics are founded on vanity and egoism more than upon carefully reasoned beliefs. Thus some of the play's central characters, and much of the conflict and the relationships in the play, depend upon Stoppard's depiction of the antiwar movement; not incidentally, Stoppard actively opposed the Falklands War during the period in which the play debuted.

Critical Overview

When *The Real Thing* first premiered in London in November of 1982, there were two distinctly different reactions to the play reactions that have come to characterize critical reaction to Stoppard's work. While all reviewers of Stoppard's writing, right from the first ecstatic reaction to *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* in 1966, have exulted in his wit and cleverness, some of them have complained that his writing lacks emotional depth.

Just such a reaction characterized Irving Wardle's hostile review of the premiere of *The Real Thing* in the London *Times*. In " Stoppard's Romance in a Cold Climate," Wardle complained that "the cumulative effect of *The Real Thing* is one of cleverness with its back to the wall." Wardle took a dim view of the debate between Henry and Annie about Brodie's play. He admitted that it was "a classic statement of the art versus truth debate" but felt that it was part of an over-riding tendency towards "self-laceration" on Stoppard's part. Wardle clearly took Henry as a stand-in for Stoppard, and to an extent he was encouraged to do so by Stoppard himself, who less than a week after he had finished writing the play declared to an American audience that he would read Henry's cricket-bat speech "as though" it were "mine."

In contrast to Wardle's cool review, the *Guardian's*, Michael Billington offered a highly favorable appraisal. Far from criticizing Stoppard for continuing to write "cold" plays, Billington praised the play as "that rare thing ... an intelligent play about love." Billington acknowledged that the territory Stoppard covered was familiar but argued that the play was worthwhile because of Stoppard's intelligent commentary on ideas connected to the theme of love. Billington's only quibble was that Stoppard had come down too hard on the then-fashionable genre of political drama. He disagreed with Stoppard's assumption that "impassioned political drama is irreconcilable with irony and finesse."

Nonetheless, Billington's review was influential, for it established the dominant interpretation of the play, that by the end of *The Real Thing*, Henry has changed for the better: "pain has transmuted him; and the assumption is that he will be a better writer and a richer man." Much of the later commentary upon *The Real Thing* followed this line of interpretation.

Paul Delaney, writing in *Critical Inquiry* a few years after the initial production, supported Stoppard's response to the then British infatuation with political drama. Delaney suggested that Stoppard "praises art which 'works' aesthetically whether or not it 'works' in terms of social utility." In effect, Delaney identified Stoppard as a cultural conservative: someone who believes that art and literature can be evaluated from a universal standard and that there is a great gulf dividing popular culture like TV, Hollywood films, comic books, and romance novels, from "high" culture like opera, theater, art films, and intellectual novels.

Delaney thus dragged Stoppard into the so-called "Culture Wars." This debate was fought largely within the universities, although it also effected high school curriculum

battles, too. The battle was divided between two fronts: on the one hand, people who felt that the curriculum should be more inclusive, and that texts should be read for their social and historical value as well as their aesthetic value; and on the other hand, people who argued that the curriculum should stay as it was, that the "new" writers critics were trying to promote were not good enough and that aesthetic values were all that counted when it came to assessing a novel, poem, or play. Delaney enlisted Stoppard on his own side the conservatives although with hindsight, readers might ponder the play's ending, when Henry capitulates and re-writes Brodie' s play, and wonder if Delaney was justified in doing so.

More than one critic picked up on the implications of Stoppard's stance against the political value of art. *The New York Times' s* Benedict Nightingale, reviewing the Broadway premiere of the play, pointed out that "every British dramatist seems to be expected to flaunt his social conscience these days." Stoppard's commitments, Nightingale suggested, were only "to be the freedom of the writer to ignore the day's prejudices, choose his own subject-matter, and treat it with all the honesty and artistry he can muster."

Nightingale wrote approvingly of Stoppard's attack on "political correctness," but not everyone was so quick to praise the playwright's representation of the relationship between art and politics. Frank Rich, also writing for the *New York Times*, thought that Stoppard had loaded all his guns and given his opponents only faulty ammunition: "Throughout the play, Henry's ideals about art and language are set against those of a fledging playwright . . . who writes poorly, but, unlike Henry, champions a social cause. Whatever the relative merits of polemical playwrights versus 'pure' writers, no light is shed here. By painting Brodie as a moral fraud and loutish philistine, Mr. Stoppard lets Henry demolish him without contest and reduces a complex debate to a smug, loaded dialectic."

Some critics saw Stoppard's sketchy representation of Brodie as yet another example of his inability to create nuanced characters. Leo Sauvage, writing in the *New Leader*, felt that Stoppard put his characters through all sorts of hoops only in order "to find a spur for the changes in Henry." The characterization that most suffers as a result of the playwright's steel-eyed focus on Henry is Annie, whose "bizarre" mixture of "superficial political militancy" is apparently compatible with "her whimsical enthusiasm" and her status as "a sort of updated symbol of *Veternelfeminin*."

The critical reception of Stoppard's twentieth play was thus fairly positive, although a few prominent critics did express some reservations about the work. Most critics applauded Stoppard's complex exploration of adultery and love and were unanimous in praising his wit and humor. A few argued that the playwright's characteristic prioritization of ideas and technique over emotions and characters weakened the characterizations and the plot development.

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 argues that in The Real Thing Stoppard takes issue with contemporary pressures to politicize art. Ifeka assesses the persuasiveness of his attack.

Critics seized upon *The Real Thing* as if it were a rainstorm in a drought, proclaiming that Stoppard had at last written a play with real characters who experienced human emotions. Precisely why they should be so enthusiastic about the playwright's tardy conversion to realism when they once enthusiastically applauded his innovative Absurdism is not clear; nor is it clear why Stoppard has been burdened with the ridiculous smear that his writing was, up until he supposedly proved otherwise in *The Real Thing*, cold and unemotional.

Stoppard had always been a playwright whose intellectual curiosity mirrored his passion for language; he had not been particularly interested in squashing his energy into a realist or naturalist dramatic form but rather had invested time in unpicking the very fabric of such genres. His decision to pick up the realist garment finally and to fit it to his own devices deserves a better response than patronizing applause. It seems unlikely, too, that Stoppard would abandon his passion for the play as a vehicle for ideas, and, indeed, close examination of *The Real Thing* demonstrates that while the dominant theme may well be that of love, Stoppard's underlying concern is with contemporary debates about language and art.

Hillary DeVries was on the right track when, in reviewing the play, she wrote that it covers "familiar Stoppard territory . . . whether our views of art, politics, and emotion have any reality beyond our own perceptions." It is no accident that the play's protagonist is a playwright. By identifying him as such, and by providing an example of his writing, Stoppard tells the audience that the key events and developments in the play will hinge upon Henry's gifts as a writer and upon his perception of writing. Henry's profession will determine the play's plot and themes. If this is a play about love, then it is a play about Stoppard's life-long love affair with language.

Stoppard famously tends to be inspired by an idea rather than an image or a story. *The Real Thing* began with an idea or rather a question: could he "structure a play by repeating a given situation a man in a room with his wife showing up three times, each differently." Implicit in this question is an understanding of "reality" as something one attains, defines, creates, rather than as a material "given." Stoppard is not interested in peeling away layers of meaning in order to reach, finally, the kernel of truth but rather in the way language transforms lived experience. It is in language and in all that language can do the "bridges across chaos" that it can build that Stoppard is most interested; love its veracity and its pain is simply the new season's ball that Stoppard throws through this eternally intriguing hoop.

Bouncing along with this question is one of the most pressing issues in contemporary Britain, that of the relation between art and politics. Henry and Annie's conflict over

Brodie's play asks the audience to consider several controversial questions. Should artists use their talent for political purposes? Can art change the "real world" in positive ways? What is the value of art if it has no overt political content? This issue was pressing in Britain for many reasons. Britain had long had a much stronger support of socially progressive art than America, and British theater has long produced cutting-edge politically conscious drama.

But British liberals were out on a limb in the early-1980s locked out of political power by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Party and seeking platforms upon which to voice their concerns. The tremendous social changes of the 1960s and 1970s had radicalized both the theater population and the left wing in general and led to acceptance of the belief that "the personal is political." It naturally followed that this applied not only to how one lived one's life but what one did in one's occupation. Amidst this noisy fray Stoppard dared to wag his finger and say "no."

He uttered that defiant syllable through the conflict between Henry and Annie over their different perceptions of the occupation of writer and the writer's material, language. Ironically, in their different ways they both see language in the same way. Annie believes words are worthless unless tied to politically meaningful freight; Henry believes them to be "innocent" and "neutral" until shaped, carefully and lovingly, into a bridge across chaos. They do, however, differ about what the motivation of the writer should be. Annie believes that words should be strung together either to lob a hefty bomb at order (the government, the state, the military) or to express a truth that defies those same forces of law and order (oppression of an individual, a person's innocence, group solidarity). Henry, however, has no interest in the relationship between language and society. As far as he is concerned, a relationship, or many relationships, may exist, but what the writer should be concerned about is each word's connection to the next word.

Irving Wardle, in his review of the London premiere of the play, assumed Henry was Stoppard's mouth-piece, a view expressed by Stoppard himself, who less than a week after he had finished writing the play declared to an American audience that he would read Henry's cricket-bat speech "as though" it were "mine." Stoppard's arguments were a welcome change from the pressure to politicize art that dominated British theater and the arts in the 1980s. His arguments remain a strong assertion of the power and the integrity of the human imagination, which, after all, should not have to leap through lion's hoops on demand but should instead be free to roam about in whatever territory and with whichever companions it delights in. Be that as it may, there are weaknesses in Stoppard's splendid sophistry.

Henry's arguments fall down when Annie asks him whether he cares in the least about "who wrote it, why he wrote it, where he wrote it." To Henry, these considerations simply "don't count." Henry's position is made to seem more reasonable because of the crassness of Brodie's writing and because Brodie is such an unappealing character. Indeed, if Brodie and Annie are meant to be the wall against which Henry batters his bleeding head, then Stoppard has given his protagonist too many cushions. As Frank Rich remarked in the *New York Times*, "the particular left-wing playwright who arouses Henry's ire proves a straw man a boorish fraud who's 'a lout with language.' Arguing at

length [against] such a pushover of an antagonist" is no difficult feat, and the same might be said of the vehicle through which Henry batters the unseen Brodie, Annie, who is indeed, as Charlotte says, "a feed" for Henry's views. Annie's naivete encourages the audience to ask why her considerations should, indeed, "count."

But count they should, albeit not in the ways that Stoppard suggests. Henry's "bridges across incomprehension and chaos" enable the writer to "nudge the world a little or make a poem which children will speak for you when you're dead." But fame is not every poet's ambition, and the bridges that were created in one lifetime can mean a different thing in another. This is precisely the beauty and wonder of language that different people in different times and places can look at the bridge and see it in a different light but it also means that the questions of "who, why, where" are fundamentally important to the reader if not to the writer.

It is at this point that Stoppard's straw man trips up, because Henry is a writer, not a reader, and Annie is an actress, not an audience member. Each character speaks about language and the profession of a writer from the perspective of the creator and the doer, rather than from the perspective of the listener and the watcher. Both, of course, touch upon these perspectives Henry in his attempt to create art that will outlast his "mortal coil" and Annie in her hope that her art will also leave its mark upon the world but their debate is rooted, fundamentally, in their own experience. "Who, why, where," are valuable considerations, for taken together with the art work they can often offer the reader an altogether fresh voice.

Does it help the reader to think about Aphra Behn's identity, and the time in which she was writing, when watching *The Rover*? Does it help the reader to consider August Wilson's background and his relationship to black and white culture when reading *The Piano Lesson*? Undoubtedly, the experience of reading and watching and listening without asking these questions is still a rich one, but holding both birds in one hand makes it richer still.

Stoppard' s intervention into the muddy forays of British cultural politics is a daring and a commendable one: one, indeed, that more writers in the period should have had the courage to follow his lead. Ideas, if unquestioned, can be illogical and indeed oppressive, no matter how progressive they appear. Stoppard's essential argument, voiced through the debate between Henry and Annie about the value of the writer and of language, is that language is "sacred" and "innocent" and that its value accrues only in use. It is a logical and a persuasive argument. Its second half, however, that the identity of the writer is meaningless, is less so. Writers should certainly not be valued simply for their identity alone: no one wants to sit through three hours of diatribe if they will not be entertained or moved. But if pursued to its logical endgame, the argument Henry advances would mean that the identity of the writer their race, their gender, their class, their family circumstances, their relationship to their culture's language would simply be discounted altogether.

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

Critical Essay #2

In this favorable appraisal of Stoppard's play, Brustein commends the playwright for turning his dramatic talents to matters of human emotion.

It has sometimes been said of Tom Stoppard, by others besides me, that there is nothing going on beneath the glossy, slippery surface of his bright ideas and arch dialogue. With *The Real Thing* (Plymouth Theater), he has decided to confound his more skeptical critics by chipping a hole in the ice for us to peek through under the proper conditions, no doubt, suitable also for fishing. You've probably heard by now what's swimming around this chilly pond. The "real thing" is Stoppard's amorous equivalent of the "right stuff' grace and style in the performance of a difficult task, in this case conducting erotic relationships.

In short, Britain's leading intellectual entertainer is now exhibiting a highly publicized, well-congratulated capacity not just for verbal and literary pyrotechnics but also for feeling, in that his characters can actually experience such human emotions as jealousy, envy, sorrow, and passion. Hearing these exotic emotions expressed, I was reminded of Racine's *Phedre*, where the lovesick heroine has been assuming all the while that Hippolytus is frigid, only to discover that he has actually been in love with the young Aricie. "Hippolytus can feel!" says the astonished Phedre, "but not for me." Mr. Stoppard's aberrational display of sentience left me equally bereft and isolated.

The Real Thing begins with a scene from *House of Cards*, a love triangle written by a successful playwright named Henry, enacted by his actress wife, Charlotte, and his actor friend, Max. Brittle enough to be a genuine piece of Stoppard invention, this is nevertheless not the "real thing" but rather a play-within-a-play (selections from Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* later form another of these Chinese boxes) about a man exposing his wife's adultery. After Henry's apartment comes in on a revolving turntable, we learn that the "real thing" is actually about the adultery of a husband. Henry has been having it off with Max's wife, Annie, another actress, though one with a bit of social conscience she has befriended a young soldier arrested for arson at an antimissile demonstration. By the second act, Henry has left Charlotte and moved in with Annie.

When Max learns of Annie's infidelity, he cries. Henry, who finds Max's misery "in not very good taste," also cries when he discovers later that Annie has betrayed him as well with a young actor. Obviously, Hippolytus can feel but Stoppard is less interested in these lachrymose calisthenics than in demonstrating how it is possible to reveal sentiment without losing one's reputation as a wit. For despite the intermittent weeping, the strongest emotion in the play is a passion for the construction of sentences, and Stoppard (ignoring Max's rebuke that "having all the words is not what life's about") is never more fervid than when Henry is celebrating his own verbal felicity. Defending himself against Annie's charge that "You only write for people who would like to write like you if only they could write" (note that even his critics speak in carefully polished tropes), Henry replies that language is sacred, even if writers are not, and "If you get the right words in the right order, you can nudge the world a little."

At this point, he has been nudging the world in the direction of quietism by ridiculing soldier Brodie' s loutish effort to compose a protest play. Stoppard, whose name was recently used in an ad by British conservatives praising our invasion of Grenada, is as tone deaf before the dissonant inflections of Western political protest as Henry is in the presence of serious music (though he is profoundly sensitive to stirrings of dissent in Eastern Europe). After Annie has rewarded Brodie's bad manners by administering some cocktail dip to his face like a slapstick pie, the play ends with a reconciliatory kiss between husband and wife, Henry writhing to his favorite rock record and Annie entering the bedroom to undress. Thus, love conquers all even casual adulteries and messy social dissent.

Considering how few people can resist a sophisticated love story, *The Real Thing* is destined to be one of the big hits of the Broadway season, and, when the rights are released, a reigning favorite of middlebrow theater companies. I found it rather coldhearted in its good-natured way, a frozen trifle with little aftertaste. Stoppard has doubtless made some effort to examine his own personal and literary problems, and his writing is rarely defensive or self-serving. But despite the autobiographical yeast leavening the familiar digestible cake mix, *The Real Thing* is just another clever exercise in the Mayfair mode, where all of the characters (the proletarian Brodie excepted) share the same wit, artifice, and ornamental diction. Even Henry's teen-age daughter, at the very moment that she is teasing her father for writing always about "infidelity among the architect class," is fashioning sentences ("Exclusive rights isn't love," she says, "it's colonization") apparently designed for inclusion in a Glossary of Post-Restoration Epigrams. No wonder Stoppard has her refer to herself as "virgo syntacta."

I think I might be less immune to the charms of this admittedly harmless piece of trivia were it not being tarted up everywhere to pass for, well, the real thing. It comes no closer to reality than any of those other adultery plays recently exported from England and it doesn't even possess the mordancy of Harold Pinter's *Betrayal* or the ingenuity of Peter Nichols's *Passion*. Born in Czechoslovakia, Stoppard has managed to perfect an expatriate's gift for mimicry allied to his ear for language is his unique capacity to imitate play writing styles. But if he began his career impersonating Beckett and Pirandello (*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*) or Bernard Shaw (*Jumpers*) or Joyce and Wilde (*Travesties*), he has recently, along with a large number of contemporaries in the English theater, come entirely under the influence of Noel Coward's witty sangfroid. The question is whether this is a style more appropriate to simulating reality or creating escapism, whether, at this critical point in world history, we are more in need of rhetorical artifice or poetic truth.

Mike Nichols's production is as beautifully manufactured as the play and, at times, equally contrived. Nichols has always gotten the best out of good actors, and his casting instinct has not failed him here. Still, there is an element of spontaneity occasionally missing from the current production as if the cast were being corseted in Stoppard's language. Jeremy Irons, looking like a dissipated D'Artagnan, bearded and baggy eyed, has a plummy time with Henry's dialogue, and commands the stage with authentic theatrical grace but Glenn Close, as Annie, tries too hard to charm us out of recognizing

that this is one unpleasant lady. An attractive actress with auburn hair and sunken eyes, Miss Close seems at times too easily persuaded of her own radiance. She smiles too much, and she has a habit of hugging herself, which injects a strain of sentimental self-love into these rather hardhearted proceedings (it is also highly unlikely, though this may be a fault of the writing, that she would be playing the young Annabella opposite a considerably younger Giovanni in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*). As for Christine Baranski as Charlotte and Kenneth Welsh as Max, they, like the rest of the cast and like Tony Walton's scenery, Tharon Musser' s lighting, and Anthea Sylbert' s clothes function as well as possible to fulfill the assigned task, which is to reflect back the showy brilliance of the two leading characters, not to mention the breathtaking contrivances of their author, in his flamboyant exhibition of what it means to be "real."

Source: Robert Brustein. "Hippolytus Can Feel" in the *New Republic*, Vol. 190, no. 4, January 30, 1984, pp. 28-29.

Critical Essay #3

Simon offers a mixed review of The Real Thing, marveling at Stoppard's theatrical skill while lamenting the mental gymnastics required to keep pace with the play right's language.

The playwright hero of Noel Coward's story "The Wooden Madonna" has been called by critics "a second Somerset Maugham," "a second Noel Coward," and "a second Oscar Wilde." I am sure that Tom Stoppard has been hailed as all that and more, and with some justification, even though unlike those three he is heterosexual. Surely his new play, The Real Thing, is as literate (barring the occasional grammatical lapse), witty, and dizzyingly ingenious as anything you will have seen in a long time, except for Noises Off, which, however, is farce rather than high comedy. In fact, Stoppard is as clever a playwright as you can find operating today in the English language. Therein lies his strength and also, I am afraid, his weakness. But do not let anything I am about to say deter you from seeing the play happily, profitably, gratefully.

In Stoppard's novel, *Lord Malquist & Mr. Moon*, there was a question so urgent that it had to be italicized: *"That's what I'd like to know. Who'sa genuine what?"* In the intervening seventeen years, things have become more complicated, and the question is not only *who* but also *what* is a genuine what. It is as if *The Real Thing* took place entirely between two facing mirrors, Life and Art, reflecting what they see back and forth to infinity (mirrors playing an endless game of Ping-Pong), except that one cannot be quite sure which mirror is which. And in trying to establish what they are reflecting with any certainty, one is forced to keep turning one's head from one mirror to the other; yet the final answer resides in the last image, the one in infinity, to which neither the dramatis personae nor the audience will ever penetrate. So both have to settle for accepting one uncertainty as a working hypothesis. But which one?

I am giving away an open secret when I say that the play begins with a scene of marriage and infidelity. Or, rather, illusory marriage, for this is a scene from *House of Card*s, a play by Henry Boot, the hero of *The Real Thing* and illusory infidelity, for the adultery in question, we later learn, was merely putative. The actors are Charlotte, Henry's real-life wife, and Max, their real-life friend, who is married to Annie in real life (I am speaking, of course, as if *The Real Thing* were real life, and as if real life existed), who, however, is in love with Henry, as he is with her. But "real life" is also a house of cards, and soon marriages collapse painfully for some, happily for others to re-form in different configurations. Will *they* last?

For example, Annie, likewise an actress as well as a militant pacifist, has, after her marriage to Henry, met on a train from Scotland a simple soldier called Brodie himself, it seems, an ardent pacifist. Upon setting fire to a wreath on a militaristic monument, he gets six years in jail for arson. To help release him sooner, Annie persuades him to write a play about what happened, a play that, being plain reality, is so bad that the extremely reluctant Henry has to be argued into rewriting it, i.e., putting enough illusion into its bare, rude truth to make it artlike, performable, real. ("I tart up Brodie's unspeakable

drivel into speakable drivel," Henry says.) Aside from being debated acrimoniously enough to break up a marriage, this train ride with Brodie will be seen, at least in part, enacted as it might have happened, as Brodie wrote it, as Henry rewrote it, and as, presumably further revised, it was done on TV. And this isn't even the main plot of *The Real Thing*, though it impinges on it, or vice versa. Which mirror are we looking at? The events of life are reflected, somewhat distorted, in art; the events of art, somewhat travestied (or more tragic?), are echoed by life. And, of course, affairs and adulteries and marriages are everywhere, but which, if any, are real? Not necessarily the real ones.

Even the recorded music, classical or popular, that gets played on phonographs or radios extends this state of reflections, echoes, multiple bottoms on and on. A trio from *Cost fan tutte* comes from an opera about infidelity that proves not infidelity unless, of course, semblance or intention equals reality. Also there's a bit of *La Traviata* on the radio, about a formerly light woman who now pretends to be unfaithful actually is unfaithful but only because she believes it will benefit the one man she adores and keeps adoring. All of which comments on the action of the play. And so on. If this makes your head spin, rest assured that in watching *The Real Thing,* the head-spinning is greatly assuaged by spectacle and mitigated by wit more wit than you can absorb, but what you can is amply sufficient. There is also something from time to time approaching real drama, real feeling, but this is not quite the real thing. Never mind, though; it, too, fascinates.

Yet, undeniably, there is loss. Cleverness, when it is as enormous as Stoppard' s, can become a bit of an enormity, especially when it starts taking itself too seriously either because it is too clever or because it is, after all, not clever enough. Wilde, you see, had the cleverness in *The Importance of Being Earnest* (from which an earlier Stoppard play, *Travesties*, takes off) not to take anything in it remotely in earnest. Congreve, in his differently but scarcely less clever *The Way of the World*, which does have serious overtones, had the good judgment not to make all the characters, situations, and speeches clever or funny. There is genuine dumbness, oafishness, evil in it. Conversely, Pirandello, the grand master of illusion, often isn't being funny at all. But Stoppard's hurtlingly, and sometimes hurtingly, funny cleverness is an avalanche that sweeps away even the chap who started it.

In *The Real Thing*, the semiautobiographical Henry Boot and, in life, the unavoidably autobiographical Tom Stoppard state or have stated their inability to come to grips with and write about love. Yet here, even more than in *Night and Day*, a less successful work, the subject is largely love, and though Stoppard has some pertinent things to say about it, his pertness militates against the pertinence. Take a woman's complaint that so much has been written about the misery of the unrequited lover "but not a word about the utter tedium of the unrequitee," where, as so often here, the very diction undercuts the *cri de coeur*, sometimes, but not always, intentionally. These characters go about their infidelities really testimonials of love meant to make the other person feel in a jokey context, with anguish ever ready to melt into epigrams. In *Peter Hall's Diaries*, Sir Peter attends a performance of Shaw's *Pygmalion* with Tom and Miriam Stoppard, and carps

that this play is "love without pain." In its more serious moments, *The Real Thing* seems to be pain without love and, finally, pain without pain.

And remarkable as the wit is, one gasps for respite. Must even a very young girl have adult wit? Must even a common soldier be a laughing philosopher? Must one wife be more clever than the next? And though much of the wit is golden, e.g., "You're beginning to appall me there's something scary about stupidity made coherent," there is much that is merely silver and tarnishes in the open air. Thus there is rather too much of what I'd call the joke of the displaced or vague referent. For example, a wife says she deplores all this humiliation, and when the husband says he regrets its being humiliating to her, she rejoins, "Humiliating for you, not for me." If her father worries about daughter Debbie's being out late in a part of town where some murders have been committed, Mother quips that Debbie is not likely to kill anyone. The archetypal form of this occurs in: "I'm sorry." "What for?" "I don't know."

Still, it is all civilized and much of it scintillating, even if Stoppard's heart seems mostly in the unfeeling jokes such as the diatribe against digital watches a long tirade whose every barb works like clockwork than in the more feeling ones such as "Dignified cuckoldry is a difficult trick, but I try to live with it. Think of it as modern marriage." (I may have got this slightly wrong, but so has Stoppard.) The play has been greatly rewritten since it left London and is, I am told on good authority, much improved here. Certainly the production could scarcely be bettered. Any laugh that Stoppard might have missed, Mike Nichols, the ingenious director, has quietly but dazzlingly slipped in, and Tony Walton's sets are charming and suggestive, and can be changed with a speed that redounds to their glory and the play's efficiency. Anthea Sylbert's costumes look comfortably lived in, and Tharon Musser's hard-edged lighting matches the author's wit.

I have never before liked Jeremy Irons, but here his wimpy personality and windy delivery work wonders for him in creating a Henry who can rattle off jests at breakneck speed, then put on the brakes to achieve heartbreaking slowness. Weakness of aspect and personality become touching, and there is throughout a fine blend of shrewdness and fatuity, irony and vulnerability. Despite his musical illiteracy and assorted pip-squeakeries, this man, in Irons' s hands, makes you believe that he is an artist of talent, and that under the flippancies, deep down in his flibbertigibbety soul, he cares about something. As his two wives, Glenn Close and Christine Baranski are both highly accomplished comediennes, who can get under the skin of comedy as easily as under that of another character. Close's English accent is better, but both look very much like English actresses, which is both apposite and aesthetically unfortunate. As Debbie, Cynthia Nixon manages to be precocious without being obnoxious. Kenneth Welsh is a marvelous Max, wonderfully different on stage and on stage-within-stage. As the young actor Billie, Peter Gallagher slips superbly from difficult accent to accent, and combines pliable ease with solid manliness. In the only somewhat underwritten role of Brodie, Vyto Ruginis nevertheless creates a fully fleshed character.

The one problem with the play is that those two mirrors are so damned clever they can reflect away even with nothing between them. That would make Stoppard another Wilde not bad. Now how about trying for another Moliere?

Source: John Simon. "All Done with Mirrors" in *New York*, Vol. 17, no. 3, January 16, 1984, pp. 64-65.

Topics for Further Study

There are several possible ways to interpret the conclusion of *The Real Thing*. Do you believe that Annie and Henry will be happy together? Or is their relationship, like their first marriages, doomed to failure?

Describe Henry's beliefs about art and about the relationship of art to society. Then describe Annie's beliefs about the same things. Which set of beliefs do you find more compelling? Why?

Discuss the relationship between the main play and one or two of the other plays Stoppard refers to in *The Real Thing*. What do these extracts suggest to the audience about Henry and Annie?

What was your response to the character of Henry? Did you feel alienated by him, or did you empathize with him? Focus your response by discussing two scenes in which he appears and using his behavior in them to illustrate your argument.

Can a comedy like *The Real Thing* really be a medium for social criticism? Focus your response by discussing two scenes in detail.

Research the rise of the television and media industry from the 1950s onwards. Has our new communications culture changed the way we think about reality? What position do you think Stoppard takes on this issue?

Compare and Contrast

1982: The Dow Jones Industrial average, a barometer of stock market activity, tops the 1000 level for the first time.

Today: In 1999 the Dow Jones Industrial average tops the 10,000 level for the first time, reflecting a booming American economy, record low unemployment, and stable interest rates.

1982: President of the Soviet Union Leonid Brezhev, ruler for eighteen years, dies. He is replaced by former KGB chief Yuri Andropov (who dies the following year).

Today: After the introduction of "peristroika" by President Mikhail Gorbachev, the Soviet Union abandoned communism and centralization in favor of market capitalism and devolution. The current leader of Russia is Boris Yeltsin, whose initially charismatic presidency has since become characterized by erratic behavior and an inability to control economic chaos and endemic corruption.

1982: Britain goes to war against Argentina over a territorial dispute involving the Falkland Islands. British forces defeat Argentina after a ten-day battle. Margaret Thatcher declares that "Great Britain was great again." In Argentina, the defeat leads to mass demonstrations and rioting that eventually topples the military government.

Today: Britain maintains an active military presence in the Falklands. It is also heavily involved in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) military actions in the former Yugoslavia, including Serbia and Kosovo.

What Do I Read Next?

John Ford's *Tis Pity She's a Whore* (1633). This passionate seventeenth-century play is the masterpiece of Caroline theater. The dominant theme is as shocking today as it was then: the incestuous love of the siblings Gionvanni and Arabella. Ford delights in exploring the ethical paradoxes created by this love.

August Strindberg's naturalist drama *Miss Julie* (1888) is now a staple of mainstream theater, but in its own day it was banned by the Danish censor. In the play, Strindberg explores the theme of cross-class love.

Stoppard's *Arcadia* (1993) is an entertaining play about the Romantic poet Byron's disappearance from Britain in 1809 and other unanswered riddles of Romanticism. It spans two different time periods. *Arcadia* was heralded as Stoppard's most intellectually ambitious play yet.

Yasmina Reza' s A r? (1997) is a wildly successful French play, translated into English, about three friends' different reactions to a new painting (a black canvas) that one of them has purchased.

Shakespeare in Love by Stoppard and Marc Norman (1998). See this Oscar-winning film to learn more about Stoppard and about Shakespeare's plays *Romeo and Juliet* and *Twelfth Night*.

American novelist and essayist Norman Mailer wrote the naturalist novel *The Naked and the Dead* (1948), about the fates of thirteen infantry men who survive the invasion of a Japanese-held island in World War II, as well as the Pulitzer Prize-winning nonfiction work, *The Armies of the Night* (1968) about a pacifist march on the Pentagon in 1967.

Alan Ayckbourn's *A Chorus of Disapproval* (1984) is a good play to compare to Stoppard's *The Real Thing*, for both plays were written within a few years of each other and both use the device of the play-within-a-play. Ayckbourn's play is set in a small provincial town and is about the antics of an amateur musical society.

Further Study

Billington, Michael. *One Night Stands*, Nick Hern Books, 1993.

This collection of the *Guardian's* famous theater critic contains a good selection from two decades of criticism.

Brook, Peter. *The Empty Space*, London, 1968.

Brook was one of the most influential theater directors in Britain in the Postwar period. He was long associated with the Royal Shakespeare Company. His directorial style showed the influences of Antonin Artaud and Bertolt Brecht. His essay collection analyses the basic problems facing contemporary theater and influenced many British and foreign directors.

Gordon, Robert. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead, Jumpers, and The Real Thing: Text and Performance,* Mac-millan, 1991.

This series focuses upon the plays in performance and is a useful guide to students of performance studies.

Trussler, Simon. *Cambridge Illustrated History of the British Theater*, Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Trussler's well-informed and forthright history of British theater from the Roman period through to the present is a very readable source book.

Bibliography

Billington, Michael. "High Fidelity" in the *Guardian*, November 17, 1982, p. 9.

Corliss, Richard. "Stoppard in the Name of Love: *The Real Thing* Brings Romantic Comedy Back to Broadway" in *Time*, Vol. 123, no. 3, January 16, 1984, pp. 68-9.

Delaney, Paul. "Cricket Bats and Commitment: The Real Thing in Art and Life" in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 27, no. 1, Spring, 1985, pp. 45-60.

Kroll, Jack. "Lovers and Strangers" in *Newsweek*, Vol. CHI, no. 3, January 16, 1984, p. 83.

Nightingale, Benedict. "Stoppard As We Never Dreamed He Could Be" in the *New York Times*, January 15, 1984, pp. 5, 26.

Rich, Frank. "Stoppard's *Real Thing* in London" in the *New York Times*, June 23, 1983, p. C15.

Rich, Frank. "Tom Stoppard's *Real Thing*: Love Lost and Found" in the *New York Times*, January 6, 1984, p. C3.

Sauvage, Leo. "Where Stoppard Fails" in the *New Leader*, Vol. LXVII, no. 2, January 23, 1984, pp. 21-22.

Trussler, Simon. *Cambridge Illustrated History of the British Theater*, Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Wardle, Irving. "Stoppard's Romance in a Cold Climate" in the London *Times,* November 17, 1982, p. 16.

Zozaya, Pilar. "Plays-within-Plays in Three Modern Plays: Michael Frayn's *Noises Off*, Tom Stoppard's *The Real Thing*, and Alan Ayckbourn' s *A Chorus of Disapproval*" in *Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingleses*, November, 1988, pp. 189-201.

Copyright Information

This Premium Study Guide is an offprint from *Drama for Students*.

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

Data Capture
Beverly Jendrowski

Permissions
Mary Ann Bahr, Margaret Chamberlain, Kim Davis, Debra Freitas, Lori Hines, Jackie Jones, Jacqueline Key, Shalice Shah-Caldwell

Imaging and Multimedia
Randy Bassett, Dean Dauphinais, Robert Duncan, Leitha Etheridge-Sims, Mary Grimes, Lezlie Light, Jeffrey Matlock, Dan Newell, Dave Oblender, Christine O'Bryan, Kelly A. Quin, Luke Rademacher, Robyn V. Young

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