Ring around the Moon Study Guide

Ring around the Moon by Jean Anouilh

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

Jean Anouilh's *Ring Around* the Moon first appeared in France in 1947 as L *'Invitation au Chateau*. Especially important in Anouilh's career, the play is the earliest of his pieces brillantes, a rather mixed group of four works moving from two lighter to two darker *pieces. Brilliantes* has been employed to describe the polished and sophisticated gemlike quality of this group, most prominently displayed in *Ring Around the Moon's* complex plotting, ceaseless obstacles, and still after all the reconciliation of almost all of its characters to both love and wealth.

Perhaps because of its parody of upper-class vanity *Ring Around the Moon* is Anouilh's most produced play in the United States, where there is a tradition of holding the aristocracy in contempt. The play's numerous characters engaged in ceaseless exiting and entrancing enhance the quick-paced wit and tangy satire of upper-class pretension and lower-class ambition. Yet *Ring Around the Moon* is unexpectedly coupled to a fairy tale ending where nearly everything comes out better. For this reason, *Ring Around the Moon*, like some of Shakespeare's comedies, succeeds on the level of both entertainment and art just one reason Anouilh is Europe's most popular post-World War II playwright.

Author Biography

Jean Anouilh was born in Bordeaux in the southwest of France in 1910. His father was a tailor known for his meticulousness, and his mother, a pianist, played in the orchestra of a casino in a seaside resort outside Bordeaux. At the resort, the young Anouilh was able to watch frequent operettas, which nurtured his interest in theater. At nine, Anouilh moved with his family to the Monmartre district of Paris, and by age twelve began writing verse plays acted for friends and relatives. At nineteen, he collaborated with Jean Aurenche on two plays, *Humulus le muet* and *Mandarine*. After briefly studying law at the Sorbonne, Anouilh became a gag writer from 1929-1931 for the cinema, and a copywriter at an advertising agency. In 1931, Anouilh married the actress Monelle Valentin and became secretary to one of the most important producer/ directors in the French theater, Louis Jouvet, who was known for his elaborate and elegant productions. Jouvet produced a few of Anouilh's early plays, which were well received. When, in 1935, Anouilh sold the rights to MGM for *Y'Avait un Prisonnier*, he gained the financial independence to devote himself to writing. Two years later, Anouilh took his work to Georges and Ludmilla Pitoff whom Jouvet referred to as *les pitoyables* (the pitiful) for their spare productions. The Pitoffs produced two of Anouilh's plays and had a major impact on Anouilh's philosophy of theater: staging made subservient to ideas.

Anouilh first developed his chronic, and often comic, misanthropy when he attempted, unsuccessfully, to collect signatures from fellow artists to protest the death sentence given to novelist and dramatist, Robert Brasillach, who was accused of collaborating with the Germans. In 1944, Anouilh gained a wide audience with *Antigone*, a version of Sophocles' classical drama. *Antigone* was a thinly disguised attack on the Nazis and the collaborationist French government headquartered in the southern half of France, in the town of Vichy, during Nazi occupation of the north. After the war Anouilh was the most successful playwright in Europe. In the United States his "costumed" plays in the 1950s fared best. These include *L'alouette (The Lark,* 1953), about Joan of Arc, and *Becket* (1959), which won a Tony Award (1955) and was filmed with Peter O'Toole and Richard Burton. By the end of the 1950s Anouilh's works began to lose critical favor with the emergence of a new wave of "absurdist drama," which Anouilh welcomed, by Jean Genet, Eugene lonesco, and Samuel Beckett. In 1987, Anouilh died in Switzerland, survived by his second wife, the actress Nicole Langon, and his four children. Anouilh was the recipient of the Grand Prize of French Cinema (1949), the New York Drama Critics Award (1957), the Cino del Duca Prize (1970); the French Drama Critics Award (1970), and the Paris Critics Prize (1971).

Plot Summary

Act I

Ring Around the Moon opens with the aristocratic *bon vivant*, Hugo, talking with Joshua, his butler, both discussing Hugo's brother, Frederic. Frederic has been sleeping outside his fiancee's bedroom window while she is a guest at the family's estate. Frederic and Hugo are identical twins, but Hugo is good with women and Frederic inept. Hugo and Joshua are unhappy with Frederic's fawning over Diana Messerschmann, his fiancee. Hugo hints he will do something about it. Hugo leaves and Frederic enters (they are played by the same actor). Frederic and Joshua now discuss Frederic's sleeping habits. Frederic assures Joshua that slumbering amidst rhododendrons is nothing serious. As one might expect from Frederic's behavior, Frederic's love for Diana is indeed insecure. Enter Patrice Bombelles (Messerschmann's male secretary) and Lady India (Messerschmann's mistress and Hugo and Frederic's cousin), who reveal their affair behind the back of the industrialist, Messerschmann. Patrice is especially worried because wealthy Messerschmann pays Patrice's salary and "keeps" Lady India. Lady India is less concerned with getting caught, is in fact fascinated by it. These two are replaced by Madame Desmermortes and her nephew, Hugo, he notifying her of Lady India's (her niece and his cousin) affair with Messerschmann. Hugo also informs Madame of Frederic's impending marriage to Diana. Madame is unhappy with Messerschmann's and Lady India's affair because Messerschmann is a mere businessman, not an aristocrat. Madame is displeased with the Diana-Frederic match because Madame believes the rich and confident Diana will overpower the subservient Frederic. Hugo again hints that marriage bells may not ring. Madame is now replaced by Romainville. Hugo informs Romainville he has seen Romainville doting on a young girl (Isabelle) and further, knows Romainville has brought her to the country to be with him. Hugo threatens to expose the meeting to Madame as a lecherous affair unless Romainville acquiesces to inviting Isabelle to the Desmermortes estate and pose as Remainville's niece. Isabelle and her mother soon arrive, the latter dazzled by the estate and the increased prospect of marrying Isabelle to a rich man. Isabelle thinks she has come just to dance. When Hugo greets them, Isabelle is preoccupied by his handsomeness. All exit and Madame and Joshua enter, planning the ball to be held that evening. In the next set of frequent entrances and exits, action is focused on an extended conversation between Hugo and Isabelle. Remainville's infatuation with Isabelle is revealed, as is Hugo's plan to parade the beautiful Isabelle at the evening ball so Frederic will fall in love with her, and out of love with Diana. Romainville rushes in to alert Hugo about a rumple in the plan: Isabelle's mother has recognized Madame's companion, Capulat, as her long lost friend. Romainville is worried Isabelle's mother will betray the plan to Capulat who will in turn tell Madame, giving away Remainville's apparently lecherous connection to Isabelle and ruining his relationship with the Desmermortes. Romainville's suspicions are confirmed after talking with the mother who has apparently already told Capulat too much. Hugo decides to tell Capulat to keep quiet, but before he can, Madame corners Romainville and intently questions him about his family connection to the enchanting "niece," a grilling through which Romainville

barely fakes his way. The final exchange of Act I has Capulat promising Isabelle's mother to help her win Hugo for Isabelle.

Act II

Act II opens at the ball with Capulat slyly giving up misguided bits of Hugo's plot to get Madame to connect Hugo and Isabelle. Madame is mystified as to Capulat's meaning and pulls her offstage to get the full story. Patrice enters with Lady India discussing Patrice's terrible fear that Messerschmann will discover Patrice and Lady India's affair. This excites India who romanticizes being poor. When Messerschmann enters, Patrice and Lady India leave, wondering if Messerschmann has seen them and guessed their affair. The next set of exchanges involve quick and uncomfortable meetings between Isabelle and Frederic. Isabelle finally tells Frederic immediately after Hugo has kissed her to arouse Frederic's jealousy that she is not, as it appears, in love with Hugo, but with Frederic. Hugo then tells Isabelle of his plan to inflame Frederic's love still further with another fictional lover pretending to challenge Hugo to a duel if Hugo does not cease his attentions toward Isabelle. Shots will then ring out and Isabelle, acting as if she thinks Frederic dead, will fake drowning. Hugo will then "rescue" her and carry her to Frederic. So happy will Isabelle act to see Frederic still alive, and so flattered will Frederic be that Isabelle attempted to drown herself on his account, Frederic will fall in love with her. After hearing Hugo's elaborate plan, Isabelle becomes so frustrated in her still-unstated love for Hugo, and so disgusted with Hugo's incredible stratagems, she runs off. Diana enters having seen Hugo and Isabelle together and is aroused to jealousy. Diana tries getting Hugo to say he loves her (Diana) but he refuses and leaves. Enter Messerschmann. Diana complains to him that she is being upstaged by Isabelle, that Isabelle is stealing the attentions of the men at the ball. Messerschmann promises his daughter he will take care of everything. Now Hugo enters threatening Patrice to expose his affair with Lady India if Patrice will not be the one to play the jealous lover and duelist in Hugo's crazy scheme. Patrice complies. Now Capulat enters with Isabelle's mother, richly dressed as "Countess Funela" a character Madame has given the mother to keep her occupied while Hugo and Madame manipulate the matches according to their own specifications. Romainville enters and tells Hugo he is distraught because Messerschmann has threatened to ruin Romainville financially unless Romainville gets Isabelle out of the Desmermortes house. Patrice now enters to play the jealous lover, insult Hugo, and challenge him to a duel. But Patrice is ignorant that by this time Hugo has forgotten the plan, preoccupied as he is with Romainville's hysteria and the "Countess Funela."

Act III

When Act III opens, Hugo, his plans in disarray, desperately discusses a new and fantastic plan no longer to match Isabelle with Frederic by having her fake her drowning but to embarrass the rich guests by exposing Isabelle as a humble girl, not an upper-class debutante as he led them to believe. Isabelle, again disgusted with Hugo, will have none of it. Hugo exits and Diana enters and complains to Isabelle about the

misfortune of wealth. Isabelle, poor as she is, is incensed and ends up fighting with Diana. When Frederic discovers them, Isabelle mistakes him for Hugo, telling him off and confessing her love. Frederic admits he is not Hugo. Diana dislikes the attention Frederic and Isabelle pay each other and says she is leaving, demanding Frederic leave with her. Isabelle, now alone and distraught, is discovered by her mother. Isabelle tells her mother the charade is finished and that they are leaving. Messerschmann enters and tries to bribe Isabelle to leave the house. She tells him she is already planning to leave and refuses his money. He cannot believe it and continues raising his offers as fast as she rejects them. Suddenly, Messerschmann becomes disillusioned about the power of money and he and Isabelle begin tearing up stacks of bills. But both are still unhappy and Messerschmann hints at destroying himself. Isabelle then attempts to drown herself for real, but Hugo rescues her. Madame now begins to bring about a happy end. She persuades Isabelle to forget Hugo and has Frederic console her in order to match them. She then attempts to convince Hugo of his love for Diana. (Meanwhile Patrice, completely clueless to the new developments, again rushes in to play the jealous lover). Lady India now walks on to announce Messerschmann is financially ruining himself by selling off his assets. Diana enters and declares that since her father is poor and her marriage with Frederic finished, she will learn to be poor. Hugo, feeling sorry for her, advises reconciliation with Frederic. Romainville enters and announces he will propose to Isabelle, but learns Isabelle is now with Frederic. In a note from Hugo brought in by Joshua, Hugo confesses his love for Diana because he thinks her poor. Messerschmann then confirms the news of his financial ruin. Lady India is moved and entranced by the adventure of being poor. The play ends with Messerschmann reading a telegram saying that his attempts at financial ruin were perceived as maneuvering, and have made him richer than ever. Messerschmann celebrates with his standard bowl of noodles, this time with a little salt.

Act 1, Scene 1

Act 1, Scene 1 Summary

Ring Around the Moon is Jean Anouilh's three-act play about the power of money and the relationships forged and broken in the name of love, or lack of it. This charade takes place in one evening at a French chateau in the late 1940s.

The play is set in a French estate in a Winter Garden on a spring morning. Although the exact date is not noted, the play was written in 1947, and it is assumed that the play's action is current. The action takes place in a large conservatory filled with hothouse flowers and plants. It is important to note that the characters of Hugo and Frederic are twins and are played by the same actor, accounting for some of the rapid stage directions.

As the play begins, a butler named Joshua and a young aristocrat named Hugo are discussing Hugo's twin brother Frederic's strange behavior of sleeping in the rhododendron bushes outside the window of Frederic's fiancye, Diana Messerschmann. Diana and her father, a multimillionaire, are guests at the estate belonging to Madame Desmortes, aunt to Hugo, Frederic and a young woman named Lady India.

Joshua and Hugo continue to discuss Frederic's strange behavior, which the men attribute to Frederic's emotional temperament combined with the rapture of love. Joshua reminds Hugo that he is ten minutes older than his twin, Frederic, which must account for Hugo's more mature demeanor. Hugo resolves to speak to Frederic about his erratic behavior and leaves Joshua.

Frederic appears in the conservatory and asks Joshua if Diana has come down from her room yet this morning. Joshua assures Frederic that he has not yet seen Diana and proceeds to question Frederic on his odd sleeping patterns lately. The gardener intends to set wolf traps in the shrubbery because he thinks it is a four-legged creature ruining the rhododendrons.

Diana enters the conservatory making some joke about confusing Frederic with Hugo, and Frederic's mood is temporarily daunted. Frederic claims to be like Hugo in appearance only, as the hearts of the two brothers are completely different. Diana continues to taunt Frederic about the possibility of confusing the two brothers, and Frederic frantically attempts to secure Diana's affections.

Frederic and Diana kiss and then leave the conservatory just as Lady India and a man named Patrice Bombelles enter. Patrice is Mr. Messerschmann's secretary, and Miss India is Messerschmann's mistress. In spite of the complications, Lady India and Patrice have been engaged in an affair, and Patrice is worried that Messerschmann may learn about the indiscretion at any time, a fact which could negatively impact the financial situation they both enjoy.

Patrice is especially wary of Hugo, who is known for his unorthodox behavior and love of confusing people by copying everything of Frederic's, even down to wearing the same type of clothes. Lady India assures Patrice that Messerschmann will never catch on to Hugo's subtle clues and actually seems to enjoy the bit of intrigue that her affair with Patrice has created in her life. Lady India feels that Messerschmann should feel fortunate that she entertains him at all and is not about to challenge the status quo.

Patrice and Lady India exit as Madame Desmortes' companion, Capulet, followed closely by Hugo, wheels her into the conservatory. Madame Desmortes and Hugo are discussing Mr. Messerschmann, who in spite of his immense wealth insists upon eating noodles devoid of butter or salt for every meal. Hugo also shares the fact that Lady India is engaging in an affair with Messerschmann, but Madame Desmortes, Lady India's aunt, finds that information difficult to believe.

Madame Desmortes is now afraid that people will assume that she asked Messerschmann to visit the chateau so that he and Lady India can further their relationship. Hugo reminds his aunt that the Messerschmanns are visiting by Frederic's request so that Frederic may announce his engagement to Diana.

This union is not blessed by Madame Desmortes because she feels that Diana is too aggressive for the mild-mannered Frederic and will completely ruin Frederic's life. Hugo implies that the marriage may between Frederic and Diana may not occur, but Madame Desmortes is not so sure. Mr. Messerschmann and an arts patron named Romainville enter the conservatory and exchange pleasantries with Madame Desmortes, who tires of the situation and orders Capulet to wheel her away with Messerschmann following.

Hugo approaches Romainville to discuss a young lady named Isabelle arriving on the noon train along with her mother. Romainville has arranged for Isabelle to stay in a local inn so that he may visit her several times a week. Romainville claims that the act is purely one of supporting the arts, as Isabelle is a dancer and needs a holiday.

Hugo threatens to tell Madame Desmortes that Romainville is having an affair with Isabelle unless Romainville agrees to introduce Isabelle as his niece and let Isabelle stay at the chateau instead of the inn. She must take part in one of Hugo's schemes. Romainville reluctantly agrees, and the two men go in to lunch at the sound of the luncheon gong.

Joshua soon appears with Isabelle and her mother, but Joshua leaves for a moment to retrieve Hugo to greet the women. Isabelle's mother is in awe at the luxury of the estate and feels that her dreams of Isabelle marrying a rich man may come true soon. Isabelle assures her mother that she, Isabelle, has been invited to dance for an event and that romance is not on the agenda.

Hugo enters and greets Isabelle and her mother. He shares the fact that Isabelle is not to dance tonight but must merely attend a ball at the estate and be the most beautiful woman there. Isabelle is skeptical, but Hugo assures her that she will be paid for her time and that the beautiful ball gown she will wear will be hers to keep. Hugo impresses

the importance of secrecy on Isabelle and her mother and returns to the dining room. Joshua escorts the ladies to their rooms, as Isabelle and her mother speak of Hugo's high potential for marriage.

Act 1, Scene 1 Analysis

The author immediately establishes that the play is about the life of the idle rich who must find ways to amuse themselves. Hugo is the main character in this regard and is well known for his pranks, especially ones that involve his twin brother, Frederic. Hugo delights in deceiving people about his identity, and it seems as if Joshua, the butler, is the only person who is wise to Hugo's tricks. In this regard, Joshua serves as a foil for Hugo's pranks and accommodates Hugo's petulance as part of the household duties.

Although Hugo and Frederic are twins, they are nothing alike in personality. The author has created Hugo to be an overly confident ladies' man who delights in games and deceit, while Frederic is a subservient, insecure young man ruled more by his heart than by outward influences.

Great skill is necessary for one actor to play the parts of both Hugo and Frederic, since the transitions between the characters happen quickly in some instances. There is much coming and going among the other characters as well, and the stage direction includes brief dialogue between a few characters that exit, followed quickly by another scenario whose characters quickly exit. This pattern is repeated frequently and can be unnerving to the reader. These rapid entrances and exits would probably be easier to grasp in a stage production. Perhaps the author has created the frenetic entrances and exits to mirror the mercurial temperaments and patterns of the characters, which are not employed in any sort of steady enterprise.

Act 1, Scene 2

Act 1, Scene 2 Summary

The time is evening of the same day, and the setting is the conservatory in various stages of decoration in preparation for the ball. Madame Desmortes sits in her wheelchair calling for Capulet to wheel her to a different location. Joshua enters, followed soon by Capulet, who has retrieved the guest list for the ball so that Madame Desmortes might inspect it once more.

Madame Desmortes reviews the guest list and laments the lack of control over who attends social events due to so many people always showing up uninvited. Madame Desmortes appeals to Joshua for help in managing the guests at tonight's ball, and she, Capulet and Joshua leave the conservatory.

Hugo and Isabelle enter, and Hugo begins to coach Isabelle on her behavior for the ball. The sounds of the orchestra are heard offstage, and Isabelle reveals her fear of going to the ball and not knowing the real reason for her attendance. Romainville enters and shares his trepidation over Hugo's plans of passing off Isabelle as his niece for the evening. Romainville begins to give Isabelle a few etiquette lessons but is cut off by Hugo, who is supremely confident that Isabelle is up to the task.

Isabelle's mother enters the room, and Hugo is immediately irritated because he asked the woman to stay out of sight. Isabelle's mother is extremely pleased with Isabelle's appearance in her ball gown and assumes that Hugo is infatuated with Isabelle, which is not true. Romainville is able to remove the mother from the room by promising her an unfettered view of the arriving carriages and guests.

Isabelle apologizes to Hugo for her mother's behavior, but Hugo is quite accustomed to society mothers pushing their daughters at him. Hugo confirms that he has no romantic intentions toward Isabelle, a statement that both relieves and disappoints her. Joshua returns to confirm that no one in the chateau suspects anything about Hugo's plan for the evening.

Finally, Hugo tells Isabelle that the plan for this evening is to make Frederic fall in love with Isabelle and forget the self-serving Diana, for whom this ball is being given. Hugo also tells Isabelle that Diana is in love with him, at least as much as Diana is capable of loving anyone. Hugo confides that, although he does not love Diana, he is probably the better match for Diana because his callous behavior fits hers better than Frederic's kind nature.

Hugo assures Isabelle that he will be near her all evening to coach her on how to behave and that all she needs to worry about is being the most beautiful and most interesting woman at the ball. Hugo will make sure the guests think he is in love with

Isabelle, and Isabelle is to make sure that the guests think she is in love with Frederic. Hugo is convinced that he can make Frederic forego Diana and fall in love with Isabelle.

Suddenly Romainville enters with the news that Isabelle's mother and Capulet, who were childhood friends, have just rediscovered each other and are in the throes of a long-overdue reunion. Hugo cannot risk the chance that Capulet will tell Madame Desmortes of the plan involving Isabelle. While Hugo and Romainville discuss this problem, Isabelle's mother enters the room to tell Isabelle of her joy at seeing Capulet again. Isabelle's mother reveals that she has told Capulet that Hugo is in love with Isabelle and has brought Isabelle to the chateau under the pretense of being Romainville's niece so that no suspicions will be raised.

Madame Desmortes and Capulet enter the conservatory, and Madame Desmortes congratulates Romainville on his beautiful niece, Isabelle. Romainville quickly hides Isabelle's mother behind a drapery to conceal her from Madame Desmortes' eagle eyes. Madame Desmortes encourages Hugo to dance with Isabelle, and he takes her in his arms as the orchestra warms up. They dance out of the room.

Madame Desmortes questions Romainville about Isabelle's lineage, but Romainville's evasive answers lead Madame Desmortes to believe that all Isabelle's relatives are dead. Satisfied for now, Madame Desmortes asks Capulet to wheel her out of the room, and they exit followed by Romainville.

Suddenly, Capulet rushes back into the conservatory on the pretense that she has left her boa. Capulet agrees to help Isabelle's mother in any way that she can to insure a successful relationship between Isabelle and Hugo, whom Isabelle's mother is confident loves Isabelle.

Act 1, Scene 2 Analysis

The author uses humor throughout the play with the intricate stage directions moving people around as well as with elaborate gestures and expressions. This type of physical comedy is much easier to grasp during a stage production than when simply reading it, which requires much imagination on the part of the reader.

There is also humor in some of the dialogue. For example, when Madame Desmortes wonders about Capulet's disappearance when she is supposed to be retrieving the guest list for the ball, Madame Desmortes expresses her frustration with humor, saying, "I sent Mademoiselle Capulet to fetch the list of guests out of my bureau. I might have asked her to restock the lake with carp, the time it's taking her."

Another example of humor in the dialogue expresses Isabelle's mother's frustration about being hidden away from the guests at the ball so that Hugo's plan will not be revealed prematurely. Romainville attempts to escort Isabelle's mother back to her room when she says, "Come along, then. I shall hide away like a dilapidated old moth who's been told not to dance round the candles."

The theme of wealth surfaces prominently in this scene, especially with Madame Desmortes, who is particularly concerned with the guests coming to her ball as well as with Isabelle's lineage. It is critically important to Madame Desmortes that her niece and nephews marry suitable people with the proper backgrounds, especially those with old money. Madame Desmortes entertains Messerschmann and Romainville at her estate but keeps them at a bit of a distance because they represent a class of new money as opposed to her family's long-standing wealth.

Act 2

Act 2 Summary

A few hours have passed, and the Ball is underway at the chateau. As the act begins, Capulet wheels Madame Desmortes into the conservatory for a respite from the ballroom activities. Madame Desmortes laments her advanced age and lack of anything interesting in her life. Even the ball going on is an aggravation and something she does not enjoy.

Capulet tells Madame Desmortes that there may be exciting things going on inside that they are not yet aware of, such as the possibility that a young, rich, handsome man has smuggled his love into the dance. Capulet cannot stop herself from revealing that a plot is underway and that the young lady's mother is anxiously awaiting its outcome. Madame Desmortes demands to know the meaning of Capulet's statements, and yet Capulet only makes allusions to the poor beautiful girl loved by the handsome young man.

Ultimately, Capulet tells Madame Desmortes that Isabelle is not Romainville's niece but Hugo's love and that Capulet hopes that Madame Desmortes will approve of their union. Madame Desmortes demands that Capulet wheel her to her room so that they may discuss the situation further.

Patrice and Lady India enter the conservatory dancing a tango, which continues throughout their conversation. Patrice is concerned that Messerschmann will discover their affair and that everything will end disastrously. Messerschmann witnesses Patrice and Lady India dancing, and the couple dances out of the room, trying to pretend that they are simply dance partners rather than lovers. Joshua informs Messerschmann that Patrice and Lady India have danced upstairs, and Messerschmann leaves after giving Joshua his dinner order of noodles without butter or salt.

Frederic enters the room quickly, as if looking for something, just as Isabelle comes in looking for chairs. The two exchange pleasantries, and Frederic excuses himself. Hugo enters and tells Isabelle that she has performed perfectly. He hides in a trellis as he sees Frederic returning.

Frederic tells Isabelle that Hugo is looking for her and expounds on Hugo's qualities as a ladies' man. Isabelle declines when Frederic offers to tell Hugo where she is. Frederic excuses himself, and Hugo returns, annoyed that Isabelle flirted with Frederic. Hugo has hired Isabelle to act as if she is in love with Hugo, and he does not want the plan to be destroyed.

Hugo sees Frederic returning and quickly kisses Isabelle. He tells her to declare her love to Frederic and then leaves. Frederic once again approaches Isabelle and mentions that he saw Hugo kiss her, and Isabelle declares that she loves him, not

Hugo. Frederic runs away, and Hugo returns to tell Isabelle that he is altering the plan to add one more alleged suitor to the mix so that Frederic's ardor will be further inflamed.

Hugo further explains that he will challenge this new man to a duel, at which time Isabelle will think it is Frederic who has been shot, throw herself into the lake, be rescued by Hugo and presented to Frederic as the ultimate gesture of love. Frederic will be overcome with love for Isabelle, who has attempted to drown herself, thinking that Frederic has died.

Isabelle has reached a breaking point with Hugo's plans and runs off just as Diana enters calling for Frederic. Diana thinks that she saw Frederic kissing Isabelle, and she dances with Hugo while he tells her that he was the one dancing with Isabelle. Diana tries to get Hugo to admit that he sneaked up on her in the park yesterday and kissed her, but Hugo denies it, claiming that he was playing billiards with Patrice at that time. Hugo also mentions that Patrice is in love with Isabelle and offers to send Frederic to Diana if he sees him. Then, he exits the room. Diana's father, Messerschmann, enters, and Diana shares her frustration. Hugo does not respond to her, and Messerschmann does not have enough money to buy Hugo's affections.

Messerschmann vows to fix the situation for Diana, especially when he finds out that Isabelle's uncle, Romainville, is in the pig iron industry, which is completely under Messerschmann's control. Father and daughter leave while Hugo and Patrice enter the room.

Hugo reveals to Patrice that he is aware of Patrice's affair with Lady India. He blackmails Patrice into participating in Hugo's game, or else Hugo will reveal the secret to Messerschmann. Realizing that he is in an impossible situation, Patrice agrees to play the part of another one of Isabelle's jealous lovers, challenged to a duel by Hugo.

Hugo and Patrice leave as Capulet enters with Isabelle's mother, who is now elaborately dressed for the ball. Capulet leaves to find Madame Desmortes just as Joshua enters the room. Joshua is shocked to see the mother dressed for the evening, as he locked the woman in her room earlier in the evening. Isabelle's mother asks Joshua to announce her at the ball as Countess Funela.

Joshua runs away yelling for Hugo as Capulet returns with Madame Desmortes, who completely approves of the mother's transformation. Hugo and Joshua return, and Madame Desmortes introduces Countess Funela to Hugo as one of her oldest and dearest friends. The women leave the room, and Madame Desmortes demands to hear all the details of Countess Funela and her beautiful daughter.

Romainville runs into the room demanding that the charade be stopped because Messerschmann has threatened to ruin Romainville financially unless Isabelle leaves the ball at once. Hugo urges Romainville to calm down and look into the ballroom, where he sees Isabelle's mother now playing the role of Countess Funela.

Act 2 Analysis

The author called his play "a charade with music," and that name is absolutely appropriate. There are so many deceptions and half-truths being enacted that it is difficult to keep track of the plot line. A charade is a pretense or an act, and every character, with the exception of Frederic, is behaving duplicitously. The deceptions and frantic stage directions combine to make a production filled with humor and shallow meaning.

Historically, the play is set in the late 1940s on the heels of World War II, when the world sees a rise in industrialism and rebuilding. The characters of Messerschmann and Romainville symbolize this new industry in Europe as opposed to the now-outdated establishments and business model symbolized by Madame Desmortes and her old money. In this regard, there is symbolism in Madame Desmortes' name, since "morte" is the French word for died.

Act 3, Scene 1

Act 3, Scene 1 Summary

A few hours have passed, and Isabelle and Hugo are alone together in the conservatory. Hugo tells Isabelle that his plan is finished and that he plans to announce Isabelle's true identity to all the guests. Hugo personally finds Isabelle unappealing and has no qualms about exposing her for the poor creature that she is. Isabelle, who was in love with Hugo, is destroyed by his callous behavior toward her and cannot understand why he does not know why revealing her true identity would be embarrassing for her. Hugo is tired of both Isabelle and the game now, and he exits.

As Isabelle ponders her future, Diana enters. The two women exchange hostile comments about each other and about the benefits and drawbacks of money. Eventually the two women end up fighting physically until Frederic enters to separate them. Isabelle mistakes Frederic for Hugo and chastises him for his wicked plan, revealing that she loves him.

Frederic is forced to admit that he is not Hugo, and Isabelle apologizes profusely for the mistake. Diana orders Frederic to follow her immediately, or their relationship is finished. Frederic asks Isabelle if she wants him to tell Hugo that Isabelle loves Hugo, but she tells Frederic that there is no longer any need to do that.

Frederic exits to follow Diana as Isabelle's mother enters the room. Isabelle tells her mother that the game is over and that they need to leave the chateau, but Isabelle's mother will not be that easily defeated. Isabelle's mother has spent several hours with Romainville, who has agreed to take care of her and Isabelle and hopefully one day marry Isabelle.

Messerschmann enters, and Isabelle's mother turns all her charms on him. Messerschmann is in no mood for pleasantries, though, and Isabelle's mother leaves so that Isabelle can speak to Messerschmann alone. Messerschmann attempts to pay Isabelle to leave because Isabelle's presence at the chateau is distressing to Diana. Isabelle refuses to take Messerschmann's money on principle, and soon Messerschmann understands Isabelle's point of view about the negative power of money.

Soon Messerschmann and Isabelle are tearing up all the money he has with him in a big display of theatrics, but neither one is happy when they are finished. Isabelle comments that even if they did not want the money any longer, it could have been given to the poor, and that makes her sad. Joshua cannot believe his eyes when he enters the room to announce that Hugo is looking for Isabelle so that he may pay her for her services tonight. Isabelle declines the payment, telling Joshua that Messerschmann has paid her. She leaves the room.

Messerschmann tells Joshua the story of Samson from the Bible bringing down the columns of the temple with his hands and insinuates that he will also be destroyed soon. Joshua does not understand Messerschmann's meaning but agrees to place the long distance call whenever Messerschmann is ready.

Act 3, Scene 1 Analysis

The author writes about the corruptive powers of money throughout the play but most importantly in this scene. Diana thinks that her money can buy anything she wishes, even if making Isabelle leave the ball. Messerschmann complies with his daughter and attempts to buy Isabelle, who cannot be bought off at any price. Ironically, the impoverished Isabelle teaches the wealthy Messerschmann the true value of money, and he begins to question his own life and considers returning to Poland to work as a tailor, as he had many years ago.

Isabelle and her mother are at opposite ends of the spectrum on the money issue, and the mother acts obsequiously to all the wealthy men in the hopes that at least one of them will want to marry Isabelle. Isabelle emerges as the heroine of the story for ultimately standing by her code and convictions when all around her are willing to adapt to any situation which will further their own objectives.

The author uses the Biblical character Samson, known for his superhuman strength and prowess, as the persona to whom Messerschmann compares himself. Just like Samson, who brought down the temple on the heads of his enemies as well as himself, Messerschmann intends to commit financial suicide to free himself of the burden of money. The author uses the metaphor of comparing Messerschmann to the powerful Samson in a way that Joshua would understand.

Act 3, Scene 2

Act 3, Scene 2 Summary

At dawn on the following morning, the ball is still in progress. Madame Desmortes wheels herself into the conservatory followed closely by Capulet, who is distressed because no one can locate Isabelle. Madame Desmortes indicates the window, saying that Isabelle has just jumped into the lake only to be rescued by Hugo.

As Hugo carries Isabelle back to the chateau, Madame Desmortes orders Capulet to get some towels and Joshua to make some hot punch. Hugo and Isabelle enter, and Madame capitalizes on her time alone with them to speak frankly. Madame Desmortes makes it clear that Frederic is a better match for Isabelle than the callous Hugo, who actually loves Diana if he will allow himself to think about it.

Frederic enters and laments his unhappiness over his broken engagement to Diana, and Madame Desmortes suggests that Frederic and Isabelle take a walk to talk about their problems. Soon Patrice comes back to the conservatory, and unaware that Hugo's charade is over, he challenges Hugo to a duel. Hugo dismisses Patrice as a nuisance just as Lady India enters, declaring the bad news that Messerschmann has been ruined financially by selling all his assets. This makes Messerschmann more attractive to Lady India. Patrice and Lady India leave, as Diana comes in bemoaning the fact that since her father is ruined, she is now poor herself. Hugo suggests that Diana could still marry Frederic and have money, but she does not want Frederic.

Hugo attempts to leave to convince Frederic to marry Diana out of a sense of honor, despite the fact that Diana no longer wants Frederic. Madame Desmortes is furious that Hugo may ruin her plan by his interference. Madame Desmortes is interrupted by Capulet and Isabelle's mother. The two women enter excitedly with Romainville, who announces his intentions to marry Isabelle. Madame Desmortes instructs Romainville that he is too late with his declaration, since Frederic is spending time with Isabelle, and she thinks they have fallen in love.

Frederic and Isabelle return to the group and announce their love for each other, a fact that thrills Isabelle's mother and Capulet. Madame Desmortes dispatches Joshua to find Hugo and bring him back for Diana, who is uncertain that Hugo loves her. Joshua returns with a note from Hugo confirming his love for Diana because she is now poor. He asks that Diana meet him in the park, and she exits immediately.

Finally, Messerschmann enters and confirms the rumors that he is broke and plans to return to Krakow to start a tailoring business. Lady India vows to take care of Messerschmann because she is intrigued with the idea of poverty. Just as the couple is about to leave, Patrice runs in with the news that the fireworks for the ball have started.

As the group moves outside, Joshua hands a telegram to Messerschmann informing him that Messerschmann's attempts to sell his assets has been mistaken for a stock market ploy, and all his stocks were purchased making him twice as wealthy as he was before. Messerschmann asks Joshua not to tell anyone of this news, and Joshua is more than happy to keep the secret.

Joshua asks if Messerschmann would like his normal breakfast of noodles, and Messerschmann asks for a little salt with the noodles this morning as a special celebration. Joshua and Messerschmann leave the conservatory to join the others in watching the fireworks display.

Act 3, Scene 2 Analysis

The author ends the play with the preeminent theme of the entire production, the perception of the value of money. As a universal rule, those who have money decry its villainous effects, while those who do not have it covet what it can bring. Ironically, Messerschmann, who truly wants to be free of the burden of wealth, ends up even wealthier than he was the day before.

Fortunately, Madame Desmortes finds the intrigue that she has been craving when she is included in the charade and is able to bring some sanity to the chaos created by Hugo. True relationships formed from compatible personalities are finally forged, and the evening is capped with the symbolic fireworks display signifying Madame Desmorte's overwhelming success.

Madame Desmortes' character at times seems calculating and shallow, but in the end, she is the one who knows exactly what she wants, whether it is a guest list or a mate for her nephews. There is no pretense about Madame Desmortes, and in this way, she is the only authentic character in the production.

As a charade, the play is filled with intrigue, deception and confusion, but ultimately, as the new day breaks, light is shed on the scenario. The characters can go about their lives with no physical or emotional encumbrances.

Characters

Patrice Bombelles

Patrice Bombelles is male secretary to the wealthy industrialist, Messerschmann, and also the object of Messerschmann's mistress's (Lady India) attentions, which Bombelles has reciprocated for two years. Unsurprisingly, Bombelles does not want Messerschmann to find out about the secretive affair, since Bombelles believes it would mean his firing. So preoccupied is Bombelles to keep the affair with Lady India a total secret, he is constantly agitated, often forgetting or missing the subject of conversation and the latest change in the main character's (Hugo) ever-evolving plans.

Geraldine Capulat

Capulat is, as Anouilh describes her, Madame Desmermortes's "faded" servant/companion. She has a minor role until she is recognized by Isabelle's mother as a long-lost friend with whom she once played piano duets. Capulat is both a hopeless romantic and a loyal friend and so cannot help but satisfy Isabelle's mother in the attempt to get Madame to unite Hugo and Isabelle.

Madame Desmermortes

Desmermortes is the elderly, overly family-and class-conscious aunt of Hugo, Frederic, and Lady India. She is interested in her nephews and niece getting married to the right companions. By helping Hugo with his plans, by acting according to her own lights, and partly through sheer luck, Madame is successful. With a sometimes cruel, sometimes sober realism, Madame parries the hopeless romanticism of her servant/companion, Capulat. Madame's somewhat hardened view of life is at least partially due to her age and confinement in a wheelchair.

Frederic

Frederic is the identical twin brother of Hugo and played by the same actor. He is also the nephew of Mme. Desmermortes, and the zealous pursuer of Diana Messerschmann. He lacks confidence, and is selfdeprecating, He constantly fawns over Diana from whom he cannot bear to be separated for a moment. Perhaps for this reason, Diana is not in love with Frederic, but Frederic's confident twin, Hugo. However inept Frederic is with women, Hugo thinks Frederic "good, sensible, kind, and intelligent." Frederic eventually becomes disillusioned with Diana's domination of him and falls for Isabelle.

Hugo

Hugo is the identical twin of Frederic, but unlike Frederic, Hugo is a confident ladies' man and according to his own assessment, a kind of evil twin to Frederic. Hugo is the play's main character because the major action of the play revolves around his scheme to lure Frederic away from Diana, who does not love Frederic, but the more confident Hugo. While Hugo knows Diana loves him, he is convinced he doesn't love her because, he says, she is rich and "badly spoilt." Hugo views himself as the enemy of upper-class vanity, and for this reason, some of the characters remark that he seems "capable of absolutely anything." The observation is not without merit since Hugo blackmails Romainville, attempts to bamboozle Frederic away from Diana, pays Isabelle to act interested in Frederic, and finally, blackmails Patrice Bombelles to fake jealous love for Isabelle in order to stir up Frederic's desire. In the end, Hugo finally confesses his love for Diana after learning she is poor.

Lady Dorothy India

Lady India is the niece of Madame Desmermortes, cousin to the twins, Hugo and Frederic, and the mistress of both Messerschmann and Patrice Bombelles. She thinks she is in love with danger, and fantasizes about getting caught by Messerschmann in the arms of Patrice. Part of Lady India's attraction to danger is an unreal desire to be poor. She is at least partially sincere: at play's end, her love for Messerschmann is rekindled after learning he has just become penniless.

Isabelle

Isabelle, a young and attractive ballet dancer, has a somewhat uncertain relationship with the character of Romainville: it appears he furnishes her with money in the guise of "patron of the arts." Whatever her motives, she accepts his attentions. At root, Isabelle is honest and considerate, but she becomes swept up in playing the part of Romainville's niece because, like so many women, she is irresistibly drawn to Hugo. Along with Hugo, Isabelle shares a certain contempt for money, which she shows when refusing Messerschmann's offers to pay her off, and when joining him in tearing up his stacks of bills. Through the aid of Mme. Desmermortes's matchmaking, Isabelle realizes she loves Frederic, not Hugo.

Isabelle's Mother

Isabelle's mother is the only character in the play fully romanticizing money and culture, partly because she once had both. She pushes Isabelle to play the part in Hugo's charade so that Isabelle might have a chance to marry him, or at least marry *someon*e with money. Isabelle's mother also turns out to be an old friend of Capulat. Fool that the mother is, she stands to give away Hugo's scheme through Capulat. To prevent her from subverting Hugo's plot, Mme. Desmermortes gives Isabelle's mother the character

of "Countess Funela" to play at the ball. This fulfills the mother's fantasies of wealth and status. In the final distribution of partners, the mother gets her wish when Isabelle wins Frederic.

Joshua

Joshua has been the respectful butler at the Desmermortes family estate for thirty years. He makes sure Hugo's plans to separate Frederic and Diana is well executed. Joshua adds comic relief not only for his dignified language befitting the stock character of the butler, but also because he often loses his composure in the face of the unexpected. As Anouilh says, Joshua is "crumbling."

Messerschmann

A wealthy industrialist, Messerschmann is also an insomniac and eats only one thing: noodles without butter and salt. He has four primary roles in life: Diana's father, paramour of Lady India, Patrice Bombelles's boss, and owner of the pig-iron company managed by Romainville. Messerschmann represents money and the rich man's belief that every person has his or her price. When he finds Diana is jealous of Isabelle, he attempts to blackmail Romainville and bribe Isabelle to get her to leave the house. When his efforts fail with Isabelle, Messerschmann's rage and sudden disenchantment with money lead him to attempt to ruin himself financially, which, unexpectedly, makes him more attractive to Lady India.

Diana Messerschmann

Diana is the attractive daughter of the wealthy industrial magnate, Messerschmann; the aloof love object of Frederic; and the thwarted pursuer of Hugo. She settles for Frederic because Hugo does not love her. Diana becomes jealous of Isabelle for stealing the glances of the men at the ball and complains to her father. It is only when Messerschmann is reported to have lost his fortune that Hugo confesses his love for the now seemingly impoverished Diana.

Romainville

Romainville is an older man who studies butterflies, probably intent on making Isabelle his next specimen. He also heads a pig-iron company owned by Messerschmann. To guard against a possible smudge on his reputation, Romainville tries to keep his pursuit of young Isabelle a secret, and so is blackmailed by Hugo into getting Isabelle to pose as Romainville's niece, out to steal Frederic from Diana. But when Messerschmann finds that Isabelle is provoking his daughter's jealousy, Messerschmann threatens Romainville with financial ruin unless Romainville removes Isabelle from the house. In the last moments of the play, Romainville decides to confess his love and propose to Isabelle. He is, however, too late. Isabelle and Frederic have already become paired.

Themes

Wealth Versus Poverty

Two sets of class conflicts occur in Ring Around the Moon: that of older, aristocratic wealth versus newer, capitalist wealth, and both of these versus poverty. Old money is represented by Madame Desmermortes, her niece, and nephews; new money by Messerschmann, his daughter, and Romainville, head of Messerschmann's pig-iron company. When Madame makes her first entrance with Hugo, discussing Messerschmann's keeping of Lady India, Madame calls it "monstrous" and "humiliating," because old money kept by new money indicates aristocratic demise, dependence, loss of status. In Act III, Scene 2, Madame Desmermortes proceeds to make sure her two charges are married happily. This is a somewhat complex matter: Frederic must not marry Diana because she will be in complete control of him because she doesn't need his money and because he is servile. This is humiliating in terms of Frederic's wealth and status, and his gender. At least if the confident Hugo marries Diana, the emotional balance will tip in Hugo's favor. Further, if Diana is poor, then a marriage between Hugo and Diana will be even less objectionable, as she will be totally dependent upon Hugo. And Madame does not object to Lady India's swooning over Messerschmann's financial ruin because he will be unable to disgrace the Desmermortes family by keeping her. This is partially why Messerschmann wants his doubled wealth kept secret. At play's end, everyone is able to retain or increase his or her wealth. Even Romainville and Patrice keep their positions in Messerschmann's even stronger financial empire.

The other conflict in Ring Around the Moon is wealth versus poverty, the latter represented by Isabelle and her mother. But while Isabelle's mother has a generous dose of class envy either new or old money being very acceptable Isabelle is not only not envious but, at least as a result of Hugo's and Messerschmann's attempt to buy her, rather contemptuous of wealth. She therefore plays the heroine. Not only does Isabelle display enough strength of character to refuse Messerschmann's and Hugo's money, but after she and Messerschmann finish destroying the money, she realizes it might have been used to help the poor. Neither she nor Messerschmann feel as if destroying the money has been of any lasting value. Anouilh, then, while criticizing certain aspects of wealth (vanity, egregious power, pettiness) and poverty (envy and awe of the upper classes), denounces neither wealth nor poverty in themselves, nor class inequality. Instead, he spins out an ending unusual in the real world: both rich and poor get richer.

Appearance versus Reality

The most obvious example of the theme of appearance versus reality in Ring Around the Moon is the use of identical, indistinguishable twins played by the same actor. But readers have an "advantage " over audience members: while readers know who is speaking, audience members cannot always tell. This robs readers of an intended

confusion accessible to only those seeing a performance. That is, unless a director dresses Hugo and Frederic differently, or alters their appearance.

The only characters confused about who is Hugo and who Frederic, are Diana and Isabelle. Diana's confusion is, however, far less total: while she mistakes their appearance on occasion or pretends to she is able to distinguish their personalities. Isabelle, on the other hand, hardly knows one from the other. If Isabelle had met Frederic before Hugo, she might even have been as infatuated with Frederic as with Hugo. Why does Anouilh wants to confuse not only the audience, but Diana and Isabelle? A partial answer is that he wants to preclude simplistic assessments like "The rich are all alike," since even identical, indistinguishable twins are not alike; are, in fact, opposites.

Two other violators of reality through physical appearance are Isabelle and her mother. Isabelle, a ballet dancer, is brought to the estate to play Romainville's niece and seduce Frederic. Isabelle's mother plays the part of Countess Funela. Both are meant to appear as though upper class. Though both poor and of the same family and gender, Isabelle and her mother are also not alike: Isabelle dislikes deceit while her mother frolics in it. But whatever the case, the poor are paid by the rich to imitate the rich in order to fool the merely wealthy into thinking the poor are really rich. Less confusingly, Hugo and Madame (old money) attempt to bamboozle the new money guests at the party, such as Romainville, and those running companies that Messerschmann (also new money) ultimately controls.

There are other examples of appearance versus reality, but these have less to do with being a part than acting a part. While the twins, as well as Isabelle and her mother are pretending to be other characters, the violations of reality by Patrice and Lady India involve acting the part of not having an affair. Lady India is, in fact, attempting, though sometimes halfheartedly, to appear as if she is not having two affairs. In addition, Romainville must act as uncle to Isabelle, and Diana acts as though in love with Frederic. Finally, at the end of the play Messerschmann wants everyone to think him poor, though he is richer than ever. Why the charade? Because it not only provokes laughs, but points to the falsity of human behavior, and simultaneously, the facility of making fools of people, including in the case of an identical actor playing Hugo and Frederic the audience.

Style

Setting

Ring Around the Moon takes place at a French country estate in spring. Why spring? Probably because it is when romance is thought to "bloom." The additional setting of a glassed-in rococo winter garden looking out on a "wide expanse of park" contributes to this fertile atmosphere. The home belongs to Madame Desmermortes and is occupied by her nephews, Hugo and Frederic, and her niece, Lady India, all of them attended by the butler, Joshua. All other characters are guests at the chateau.

Dialogue

The dialogue in *Ring Around the Moon* is entirely social: it contains no soliloquies. Dialogue, as the word indicates, is always directed at someone, most often taking the form of persuasion, coercion, or attack. Recall the dialogue about money between Messerschmann and Isabelle, Hugo's numerous coercions of Romainville, Patrice, and Isabelle, and Diane's toying with Frederic. This is dialogue as manipulation.

Music

Music occurs primarily in Act II at the evening ball, where it may reinforce the idea that precise and numerous entrances and exits of a multitude of characters are a kind of comedic dance. When Hugo blackmails Patrice into acting as Isabelle's jealous lover, a kind of battle of wits results, and so Anouilh calls for a "heroic, warlike tune."

Movement

The movement of *Ring Around the Moon* consists of a multitude of precisely timed entrances and exits, especially of the identical twins, Hugo and Frederic, played by the same actor. In the final act of the play, Hugo must send in "for reasons which you all know" a note from offstage in which Hugo confesses his love for Diana Messerschmann. The reason? Frederic is already onstage. In Act I, Scene 1, just before Diana and Frederic exit, Diana states that Hugo is "capable of absolutely anything." Patrice and Lady India immediately walk on, Patrice speaking these same words, producing a neat transition between different situations and characters with Hugo's interference in common. Finally, it is fitting that in this play full of movement, the heroine, Isabelle, is a dancer.

Historical Context

During the course of World War II (1939-1945) the Germans invaded Paris and occupied the northern and western parts of France from 194CM4. The rest of the country was under the authority of the puppet government of Vichy led by Marshal Petain and supported by much of the traditional French right. Simultaneously, General Charles de Gaulle was organizing the resistance movement of the Free French from London. Soon after the American, British, and Canadian military invasion on the Normandy beaches on June 6, 1944, de Gaulle entered Paris to head the new government.

France's defeat by the Germans unexpectedly prodded modernization forward after the end of Nazi occupation and the Vichy regime. The resistance movement that emerged, though existing in frictional coexistence, contained most of France's forward-looking elements. With the right discredited and the resistance elements committed to significant change, the two-year life of the post-WWII liberation coalition after November, 1944 allowed a wide range of reforms. Extensive nationalization of industry endowed the central government with new power over the direction of France's economy and France's welfare state greatly expanded. Modernizing technocrats, represented by Jean Monnet and his planning commission, were eager to use the new state levers for rejuvenated control. Strong state influence pushed France's postwar development in a different direction from many other European countries whose industries were not nationalized.

Post-Liberation French governments did not fare so well at building new political institutions. Disputes between General Charles de Gaulle and the left over the role of the head of state led to de Gaulle's angry resignation and denunciation of the emerging "regime of the parties." In the Fourth Republic Constitution (1946-1958) barely approved by the electorate the National Assembly became the seat of all power. Its majority coalitions, made volatile with a new system of proportional representation, became even more unpredictable when the Cold War began in 1947. France's political alignment on the side of the United States forced the Communists, who represented twenty-five percent of the electorate, into quasi-permanent sectarian isolation. Governments thenceforth were constructed from among center-left and center-right groups that rarely agreed. The Fourth Republic drifted to the right and progressively fell under the sway of forces determined to preserve colonialism. Thus from 1946 to 1958 there was costly and divisive warfare, first in Indochina (1946-1954) and then in Algeria (1954-1962). The postwar years deeply changed French society: consumerism was born, the service sector rapidly expanded, and high-tech national projects were successfully launched. Modernization of the economy led to continuing attrition of aristocratic elements represented in Ring Around the Moon by Madame Desmermortes and their gradual replacement by the newer and more influential money of industrialists like Messerschmann.

Critical Overview

Jean Anouilh's Ring Around the Moon first appeared in France in 1947 where it was and still is entitled, L 'Invitation au Chateau. The play is especially important because it marked a transition between Anouilh's *pieces roses*, plays in which characters escape dark conditions through fantasy, illusion, and change of personality, to Anouilh's *pieces brillantes*, a more mixed group of four plays with *brilliantes* referring to polished and sophisticated gemlike pieces. The first two plays of the *pieces brillantes*, which include *Ring Around the Moon*, were lighter plays closer to their "pink" precursors. The latter two plays were more ponderous, weighed down by gritty reality.

In *Jean Anouilh*, Alba della Fazia called *Ring Around the Moon* a "pleasantly jumbled fairy tale" and selects Isabelle as the play's heroine, primarily for her rejection of money and her understanding of when to end her part in the charade. In Jean Anouilh, Marguerite Archer echoes della Fazia's description of the play as a fairy tale: "Here, the ending is a happy one, achieved by Anouilh when he combines the themes previously exploited in *the pieces noires* [earlier, darker pieces in Anouilh's career], so that money and love can exist side by side in harmony." Lewis Falb in his *Jean Anouilh*, sees a darker center to Ring Around the Moon: "Though the action resembles a lighthearted charade, beneath the surface there are disturbing undercurrents." Falb's comment is developed at length in Leonard Pronko's The World Of Jean Anouilh. Pronko says that Hugo is without feelings because, since he plans to pay Isabelle to act her part, and does not think she deserves consideration. Pronko goes on to say that in Anouilh's work, "men are so selfish that they seldom take their fellows into consideration. The primary social unit the family has broken down, and acts not as a group but as a heterogeneous mixture of individuals. With little regard for conventional morality, each goes his own way." For Pronko, then, Falb's "disturbing undercurrents" in Ring Around the Moon revolve primarily around selfishness issuing from monetary concern. Anouilh thereby becomes a critic of the intersection where society meets money. A more recent analysis of *Ring Around the Moon* reconciles the play's lighter and darker elements. H. G. Mclntyre in *The Theatre of Jean Anouilh* sees this reconciliation in the marriage of form with content: "The vision of life may be bleak but an antidote to it lies in the comic form of the play . . . Implicit in all this is an ethic of endurance not of rejection and self-sacrifice ..." Mclntyre goes further: not only does comedy help us endure, but so does the practice of theater.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4
- Critical Essay #5

Critical Essay #1

A playwright and poet, Chris Semansky teaches literature and writing at Portland Community College. In the following essay he discusses the role of class conflict in Anouilh's Ring Around the Moon.

Behind the thinner, lighter veil of Jean Anouilh's charade, Ring Around the Moon, lies two sorts of class conflict. First, is the friction between the older aristocracy ("old money") and the emerging and usurping industrialist bourgeoisie ("new money"). The second is the tension between both of these wealthy groups and the working class. The characters belonging to each camp are as follows: in the aristocracy, the Desmermortes side composed of Hugo, Frederic, Lady India, and Madame. In the wealthy bourgeoisie, the Messer-schmanns: Messerschmann, Diana, and though not part of the family, Romainville, because he runs Messerchmann's pig-iron company. Also in this class are many of the unnamed and unspoken guests at Madame's ball who, Diana states, work for Messerchmann. The last group, the working class or poor, includes Isabelle and her mother. All other characters fall somewhere between these camps since they are attached to the upper classes: Joshua and Capulat to the aristocracy, Patrice to the industrialist bourgeoisie.

The core conflict between old and new money erupts in the imminent marriage between Frederic (old) and Diana (new). Frederic, the "good" twin, cares little for class. But he is betrothed to the wealthy Diana. This is probably no mere coincidence since, usually, the moneyed classes are as segregated as the poor, self-segregation ensuring preservation of wealth and a sense of superiority. It is not clear what Diana is after by settling for Frederic when she really wants Hugo, but Diana's motivation might be her desire to marry into wealth, even if it means losing her happiness. But whether Diana marries old or new money seems of little concern to her. Nor does it concern Messerschmann since, after all, he has taken Lady India (old money) as a mistress. But it might be that the two Messerschmanns' do care, and consciously or unconsciously, pursue the old-moneyed Desmermortes to gain sophistication through association with "class," "breeding," and education. Through linkage with the Desmermortes the Messerschmanns might be able to have their wealth and eat it too.

The aristocratic Desmermortes, on the other hand, want little to do with the bourgeois Messerschmanns. Madame Desmermortes is humiliated by news that Messerschmann is "keeping" (paying for) her niece, Lady India. Madame exclaims: "She is a Fitzhenry! And through me, a Desmermortes. If only your uncle Antony were alive it would kill him." Desmermortes money has been transmitted by inheritance from generation to generation and is therefore "purified" by being kept within the family. Messerschmann's money, however, is recently gained through business, himself having been a member of the lower classes only "yesterday." Madame's humiliation over these matters is of less concern to Hugo with his narrower criteria for upper-class superiority. Hugo is less concerned with family than with breeding. For Hugo, money is not to be pursued or displayed as "mere" wealth, but instead, used for the sake of racheting up one's civility, culture, and refinement. Hugo's complaint about mixing blood and money with the

Messerschmanns apparently has less to do with them having it (after all, Hugo is rich), than with the way they deploy it. Although not fleshed out, Hugo's "healthy" contempt of money likely comes from the fact that he takes it for granted. Contempt for wealth (but not for breeding) Hugo likely thinks, is beyond the understanding of the bourgeoisie who continue to worship money like the lower classes, whom these Messerschmanns still are in disguise. And so, Hugo thinks, how dare Frederic stoop to Diana; how dare Lady India allow herself to be had by that mere businessman, Messerschmann.

And who does Hugo blackmail? Romainville, that second-tier wealthy bourgeois connected to Messerschmann, and Patrice, Messerschmann's secretary engaged in an affair with Hugo's aristocratic cousin, Lady India. Hugo's blackmailings are not mere means to break up the ill-fated Diana-Frederic love match, but ends, battles fought against those economic upstarts, the Messerschmanns, and their lackeys, Romainville, and Patrice. It is no coincidence Anouilh calls for battle music during the scene in which Hugo blackmails Patrice.

Finally, in the war between the upper echelons, there is Lady India, the peacemaker. Like Hugo, she takes wealth for granted. But unlike Hugo, Lady India does not manifest contempt for the bourgeoisie. After all, she is Messerschmann's mistress. But she is attracted to danger, specifically to "slumming, " associating with the lower classes. This is at least part of her attraction to a mere secretary (Patrice). At the "further reaches" of danger, Lady India is not just attracted to the poorer classes, but to poverty itself. She believes so strongly that she would like to be poor, that she falls hard for Messerschmann when it looks like he is financially ruined. Lady India, unlike the play's other major characters, is in conflict with no one. She is the bridge not only between the upper classes, but also between upper and lower classes. While this might cast Lady India as the play's heroine great bridger of all gulfs Anouilh portrays her as a fool, in love with the state of poverty only because she has never visited. Thus, her poor sense of economic and social geography.

The battle between upper and lower classes involves both major and minor characters. For example, Joshua, Capulat, and Patrice partially escape inclusion in the working or poorer classes because they are attached to the upper classes, not just by working for them, but by living with them. Just as house slaves had more status than field slaves, so do Joshua, Capulat, and Patrice as "house slaves" have status over Isabelle and her mother, the "field slaves." There is, however, one last division among the lower classes. As Anouilh divided the upper classes into old and new money, he divides the poorer, working class into the envious (Isabelle's mother) and the complacent-if-not-contemptuous (Isabelle). Isabelle's mother shares features with both branches of the upper classes. With the aristocracy, she shares a love of breeding, as evidenced by having studied piano at a conservatory. Further, she has enabled Isabelle to study ballet, both of these, piano and ballet, being aristocratic pleasures. She also once belonged to the bourgeoisie: "Always remember, Isabelle, your grandfather was the biggest wallpaper dealer in the town. We've even had two servants at the same time." Isabelle's mother aspires to both branches of the upper class, if not for herself, then for her daughter. Isabelle's mother does not call her objects of aspiration old or new money, aristocracy or bourgeoisie, but sums them up with "beauty" (more often referring to old

money rather than new) and "luxury" (more often referring to new money rather than old). Isabelle's mother is not particular. She would be happy with either Romainville or Hugo as an upwardly mobile catch for Isabelle.

Isabelle, unlike her mother, aspires to love more than money. She does whatever chore needs doing, and doesn't dream of being rich so that, someday, servants will do it for her. Her mother's unabashed upper-class aspirations embarrass Isabelle who is not attracted to Hugo because of his wealth, but because he is handsome and confident. Money is nowhere apparent in her aspirations. Even Isabelle's ballet dancing seems a product more of her mother's aspirations than her own desires. Isabelle's disinterest in money turns to hostility in the memorable scene where Isabelle refuses offers of money from Messerschmann and from Hugo, and where she and Messerschmann tear up his stacks of bills. While Messerschmann tears up the currency because he resents money's loss of power, its death if you will, Isabelle tears it up to render it powerless, kill it. But neither Messerschmann nor Isabelle are made happy by such destruction. Isabelle remains unhappy because tearing up money does not help the poor. Moreover, Hugo does not care for her, and has only used her in his botched charade against upper class vanity, showing his contempt, as well, for the lower classes and those recently escaped, namely Messerschmann. And so through the insensitive and repellent actions of both old and new money (Messerschmann, Hugo, and Diana all display open class contempt), Isabelle finally ceases an outlook of quiet humility and satisfaction, becoming contemptuous of the rich. Revenge, however, is not open to one such as Isabelle, who can only separate herself from what is everywhere repellent by attempting suicide. When rescued, Isabelle becomes Anouilh's official hero by rewarding her more than any other character: only Isabelle moves up a few notches on the economic and social scale. But the other characters make out pretty well too: no matter what kind of folly absorbs them, Anouilh forgives them by letting them keep their money and status. He is forgiving ... unlike the world he assaults.

Source: *Chris Semansky, in an essay for Drama for Students*, Gale, 2001.

Critical Essay #2

Brent has a Ph.D. in American Culture, specializing in film studies, from the University of Michigan. She is a freelance writer and teaches courses in the history of American cinema. In the following essay, Brent discusses literary, biblical and mythological references in Anouilh's play.

Biblical, Mythological and Folkloric References in Ring Around the Moon

The dialogue of Anouilh's play *Ring Around the Moon* includes several references to folk, biblical, mythological, and English literature. A greater understanding of the sources of these references helps to illuminate the thematic concerns which run throughout the play.

Calliope. In Act I, Scene 1, Hugo discusses his twin brother Frederick with Joshua, the elderly butler. Joshua is informing Hugo that Frederick, who is in love with Diana, has spent the past five nights sleeping in the rhododendron bush outside of her bedroom window. Joshua explains to Hugo that he has slept in the rhododendron bush "beside that statue they call Calliope, a classical character, sir." In Greek mythology, Calliope is the primary of the nine Muses. The Muses are a group of goddesses, all sisters, daughters of Zeus, who were originally considered to be the patron goddesses of poets and musicians. They later each became associated with different branches of the arts and sciences, and statues of the various muses were popularly sculpted holding various objects indicating these associations. The name of Calliope means "she of the beautiful voice." Calliope is considered the muse of heroic or epic poetry, and sculptures often depict her with a writing tablet in her hand. She is considered to be the mother of Orpheus, the musician who played the lyre.

Croesus. Later in Act I, Scene 1, Hugo, in talking to Mademoiselle Desmortes, describes Mr. Messerschmann as being "as rich as Croesus." Croesus was a king of ancient Lydia, who reigned from 560 B.C. to 546 B.C., and was known for his great wealth. Main events during his reign include the conquest of the Greeks on mainland Ionia, and subsequent defeat by the Persians. The name of Croesus continues to be associated with extensive wealth, and he was known for bestowing lavish gifts upon the oracle at Delphi, which appears in many Greek myths. While Croesus was a historically real person, his reputation and fate have taken on mythical status in the writings of ancient Greek historians. Some say that upon defeat by the Persians he tried to burn himself alive, but was saved from death by his captors; some say he was condemned to death by fire, but was saved by the god Apollo; and some say he was made a government official for the defeating nation. One of the prominent myths about Croesus, according to the ancient Greek historian Herodotus, is that he met with Solon, an Athenian law-maker, who lectured him on the virtues of good fortune, rather than wealth, as a source of happiness.

Reference to Croesus is significant because it indicates a central theme of Anouilh's play: wealth and poverty. Except for Isabelle, her mother, and the various servants, the

central characters of the play are wealthy beyond all measure. The arrival of Isabelle and her mother into this world of rich socialites initiates a tension between rich and poor, and incites debates among characters over wealth and poverty. Messerchsmann is compared early on to Croesus, and this comparison is echoed toward the end when he realizes that wealth is not a source of happiness. Isabelle's role in this realization is comparable to the role of Solon, in that she provides Messerchsmann with a similar insight.

Helen of Troy. In Act I, Scene 2, Hugo tells Isabelle that the dress she has been given to wear "makes you look like Helen of Troy." Helen of Troy, in ancient Greek mythology, was a daughter of Zeus, and was the most beautiful woman in Greece. According to legend, she was the impetus behind the Trojan War, which explains references to her as "the face that launched a thousand ships." Isabelle's enchanting beauty is central to her role in Anouilh's play. It is agreed by all that she is the most beautiful presence at the ball, and her arrival is the catalyst which effects a change in the dynamics of the wealthy socialite world into which she has been thrust.

Cinderella In Act I, Scene 2, there is an exchange between Isabelle's mother and Hugo, in which the Mother refers to herself as "poor little Cinders." She is of course referring to the fairy tale Cinderella, in which the abused and neglected stepdaughter is visited by a fairy godmother who grants her the opportunity to dress in finery for a ball, at which she dances all night with the Prince himself. According to the *Encyclopaedia Britan-nica*, this folktale dates back as far as the 9th Century AD, and has appeared in over 500 different renditions. In Anouilh's play, Hugo asks Isabelle's mother if she would like supper brought to her in her room, to which she replies, "Just a crust, a crust and a glass of water for poor little Cinders." Isabelle's mother is an impoverished woman continually attempting to push her daughter on any rich man who comes her way. She is a selfish woman who embarrasses Isabelle, and continually laments her own poverty and lost youth and beauty. In comparing herself to Cinderella, the abused and neglected stepdaughter, the mother expresses a self-serving self-pity. Meanwhile, it is Isabelle who shares the role of Cinderella in Anouilh's play. She is a poor, beautiful, yet humble, girl who needs only to be dressed up in the finery of the rich to become, like Cinderella, the belle of the ball. And, by the end of the play, she does, in fact, find her prince charming in the form of the wealthy Frederick, the twin brother of Hugo (although she at first believes herself to be in love with Hugo).

Critical Essay #3

Robinson Crusoe. In Act I, Scene 2, the wheelchair-bound elderly woman Mme. Desmortes makes reference to the classic English novel *Robinson Crusoe* (1722), by Daniel Defoe (1660-1731). *Robinson Crusoe* is the story of a castaway on a deserted island who must make do with limited resources in order to survive harsh and solitary conditions. In Anouilh's play, the excessively wealthy and privileged Mme. Desmortes compares herself to *Robinson Crusoe* when she is momentarily stranded in her wheelchair without a servant to escort her, and without a nearby "bell-rope" she could use to summon a servant.

Mme. Desmortes: "Really, how marooned one is away from a bell-rope. I might be Robinson Crusoe, and without any of his initiative. If only one's governess, when one was a girl, had taught one something practical like running up a flag or firing a gun."

When a butler, Joshua, appears, she continues the comparison of being lost at sea, remarking, "Thank Heaven I'm on some sort of navigation route." She commands Joshua to "Put into land for a moment, my dear man, and rescue me. I was washed up here fifteen minutes ago, and I haven't seen a living creature since."

Mme. Desmorte's extended comparison of herself to Robinson Crusoe not only establishes her character as extremely witty, with a keen, ironic sense of humor, but also demonstrates her ability not to take herself too seriously, as expressed by her tendency to jokingly exaggerate her circumstances. This reference also continues a theme of water imagery which runs through the play.

Byronic Poetry. In Scene 1, Act III, Hugo launches into an extended discourse in conversation with Isabelle, who listens attentively. Hugo has been using Isabelle in a scheme to distract his brother from his unrequited love of Diana. He explains that he is going to invent a lofty and romantic past for Isabelle, which he will use to deceive the guests at the ball as to her origins. Hugo muses that he will tell everyone that "you're the wonderfully wealthy side-issue of a Portuguese princess and an Admiral, an Admiral who wrote Byronic poetry and was drowned at sea." The idea of the Admiral drowned at sea picks up on the water imagery which runs throughout the play, such as in reference to the fictional character Robinson Crusoe. Hugo's mention of "Byronic poetry" refers to a style of Romantic poetry by the infamous English poet, Lord Byron (1788-1824). Byron is best known for his extended poem *Don Juan* (1819-1825), which is a satiric recounting of the adventures and exploits of a young man. In one segment of the poem, Don Juan becomes a castaway on a Greek island after surviving a shipwreck. The reference to Byron thus indirectly echoes Anouilh's theme of water imagery in the play.

Critical Essay #4

Samson. In Act III, Scene 1, the rich man Messerschmann has a conversation with the old butler, Joshua, in which Messerschmann mentions the Biblical myth of Samson. Samson is a figure from the Old Testament whom some scholars consider to be purely mythical, but whom others consider to be a historically real figure. The story of Samson is that his parents were told before his birth that he was to be a Nazarite, a person chosen by God to abstain from liquor, avoid contact with dead bodies, and never shave or cut his hair. Samson was known for his incredible physical strength, but his downfall was always his passion for Philistine women. The most famous story about Samson is that he was seduced by the Philistine Delilah, who tricked him into revealing the secret of his incredible strength: his long hair. As he slept Delilah cut his hair, depriving him of his strength so that he could be captured by the Philistines, blinded and forced into slavery. Samson's final act, although blinded and enslaved, was to use his strength to tear down the Philistine temple, where the worship of false gods was carried out, destroying both the Philistines and himself in the process. This act is seen as his final return to the service of the Jewish god Yahweh for which his life was originally intended.

In conversation with Joshua, Messerschmann recounts the tale of Samson, comparing himself to this mythical figure.

M: "You must have read your Bible when you were a little boy? J: Here and there, sir, like everybody else. M: Did you ever come across Samson? J: The gentleman who had his hair cut, sir? M: "Yes; and he was very unhappy. Jeered at, my friend, always jeered at by everybody. They had put his eyes out. They thought he was blind, but I'm sure he could see. J: Quite possible, sir. M: And then, one fine day, unable to stand it any more, he got them to lead him between the pillars of the temple. He was very strong, terribly strong, you understand? He twined his arms round the pillars" (he puts his arms around Joshua) like this.

Messerschmann continues, "And then he shook them with all his might." He was so strong the entire temple crashed down on to the two thousand Philistines who were there praying to their false Gods and thinking Samson no better than a fool." Joshua points out that, "it fell on him, too, sir," to which Messerschmann replies, "But that wasn't of any kind of importance." Messerschmann then explains to Joshua that he will be "putting through an overseas telephone call" that night. Messerschmann tells Joshua that he will be doing this, "Like Samson. With my eyes tight shut."

This conversation between Messerschmann and Joshua occurs late in the play, just after an extended exchange between Messerschmann and Isabelle, the impoverished young dancer whom he has invited to his home with the intention of making her his mistress. Messerschmann is like Samson in that his lust for women has been the cause of his moral depravity. Through his conversation with Isabelle, he comes to realize that his wealth is no source of happiness, and he rashly decides to make a financial decision that will undoubtedly impoverish him. Messerschmann's intention is to alter his financial situation with a single phone call. Like Samson tearing down the temple,

Messerschmann plans to perform a final act of moral good by symbolically tearing down the temple of wealth in which he and his fellow socialites worship the false gods of money and luxury. Messerschmann performs this act "blindly," like Samson, meaning that he does not stop to consider the consequences of such as brash act as turning himself from a rich man into a poor man. And, like Samson, he may bring on his own ruin in the process of performing an act for the cause of a greater good.

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

Critical Essay #5

In the following review, Isherwood presents negatively the revival of "Ring Around the Moon" through its actors.

Lincoln Center Theater's revival of Jean Anouilh's *Ring Round the Moon* is a real heartbreaker but for all the wrong reasons. Christopher Fry's adaptation of Anouilh's comedy has not often been staged since its original London and Broadway productions in 1950, and it's easy to see why: The play is uncommonly delicate, a poetic mixture of farce, romance and comedy of manners that must also accommodate a whiff or two of mortal thoughts (it was written in the shadow of World War II). Fry subtitled his sparkling adaptation *A Charade With Music*, and indeed it has the sweeping rhythms of a dance not for nothing is the play's heroine a ballerina. Unfortunately, what's onstage at the Belasco Theater more often than not has two left feet. Gerald Gutierrez's largely miscast production betrays the play's gossamer sensibility; what should taste like a spun-sugar confection goes down more like chewy taffy.

The disenchantments begin even as the curtain rises on John Lee Beatty's set, a rather literal-minded reworking of Oliver Messel's famed London original. Beatty's garden gazebo manages the signal feat of seeming both flimsy and oppressive. The airiness that is the soul of the play is lost the characters cavort in this chamber like trapped moths. (The play cries out for the liberating imagination of a Bob Crowley.) The young British actor Toby Stephens plays the central roles of the twins Hugo and Frederic, and here, too, delicacy is lacking. Stephens comes from sturdy theatrical stock he's the son of Maggie Smith and Robert Stephens and he's definitely an actor in the grand English tradition. As such, he does not have a natural, light touch, as anyone who saw him in the Almeida Theater Co.'s recent Racine plays at BAM could attest (and surely the producers did).

Stephens does have an authentic upper-crust charm, and is amusingly snippy as the heartless Hugo, whose scheme to wean his twin brother from his love for Diana Messerschmann (Haviland Morris) who in turn loves Hugo sets the carousel of the plot in motion. But as the lovesick Frederic, he's really just Hugo sulking there's no soul in his Frederic, no romance. His performance is professional but artificial, and more artifice is the last thing this sweet piece of whimsy needs.

The play is set in 1912 France, at the chateau of the twins' aunt Madame Desmermortes (Marian Seldes), an imperious woman whose reliance on a wheelchair hasn't kept her from ruling her little fiefdom with an iron fist.

Guests at the chateau include Diana's father, Messerschmann (Fritz Weaver), a Jewish business magnate who controls the destinies of his fellow visitors; Lady India (Candy Buckley), Messerschmann's mistress and Desmermortes' niece; and his secretary Patrice Bombelles (Derek Smith), who also happens to be India's lover.

Hugo has invited to the chateau a beautiful ballerina from Paris, Isabelle (Gretchen Egolf), in the hopes that by turning her into the belle of the ball he can turn Frederic's head, curing him of his hopeless love for Diana. But the sensitive Isabelle, as fate would have it, falls instantly for Hugo himself, and it takes some sorting out before she is united in bliss with the equally sensitive Frederic.

With everyone either in love, trying to get out of it or observing it with variously cynical, practical or sentimental attitudes, the play is a comic poem on the vagaries of romance. It also contains wry reflections on the elusive nature of happiness: Diana's riches can't win her the love of Hugo and her father's constitution is so poisoned by the excesses delivered by his wealth that he has been relegated to a diet of unsalted, unbuttered noodles.

But the subtle strains of melancholy and the affectionate tone that suffuse the comedy mostly are muted here. Emblematic of the production's clumsiness is the bull-in-a-china-shop performance of Joyce Van Patten as Isabelle's mother. Her character is supposed to be silly and pretentious, but Anouilh observes even her with a measure of sympathy. You'd never guess it from this production, which turns her into a crass buffoon with an American accent.

Indeed all the characters in *Ring Round the Moon* are dusted with poetry, even the most fiercely pragmatic or comically cynical. And yet virtually none of the performers in this production give lyrical or graceful performances. The fault is the director's; Gutierrez plays the comedy too heavily and lets the tender essence of the play evaporate.

Morris' Diana is a flat, shallow interpretation of a character whose haunted depths are revealed in a striking monologue in the second act, when she recalls a traumatic childhood experience of anti-Semitism; this feeling should infuse the rest of the performance, but it doesn't. The pathos of Messerschmann himself is only hinted at by the gruff Weaver. Buckley's India, replete with tongue-in-cheek English accent, isn't even convincing as a small-L lady, and her business with Smith's Patrice is overcooked.

The beautiful Egolf has a graceful, willowy presence and comes very close to capturing the ethereal spirit of Isabelle. But the role requires an actress who can suggest infinite feeling with the subtlest of inflections, and Egolf ultimately cannot (merely to look at a photo of Claire Bloom in the original production is to be enchanted).

The estimable Seldes is gloriously entertaining as she dishes out Desmermortes' eloquently phrased, Lady Bracknellesque put-downs, but she is not entirely right for the role. Her astringent delivery of the part's waspish witticisms ultimately obscures the essential goodness of the character. (Irene Worth was to have played it, with Seldes gallantly doing one performance a week, but Worth had to withdraw because of a stroke.)

While Simon Jones strikes just the right, straightforward note in his small role, it's really only Frances Conroy, as Desmermortes' companion, who manages to walk the fine line between tender feeling and high comedy that runs through the play. Her overwhelmed

effusions about the young lovers' fates are both brilliantly funny and tinged with a real pathos. She isn't onstage for long, but Conroy makes the most of her time.

Sadly, the same can't be said for the production itself. This revival of a lovely play about romantic opportunities seized is a theatrical opportunity lost.

Source: Charles Isherwood, "Ring Around the Moon," (review) in Variety, Vol. 374, Issue 11, May 3, 1999, p. 94.

Topics for Further Study

Beginning a decade or so before the French Revolution (1789), research the history of industrialism in France, focusing on the friction between the old-money aristocracy and the new-money bourgeoisie. Then write an essay detailing some of the consequences of such friction.

After researching the history and form of *commedia dell'arte* write an essay discussing how stock characters in that form resemble those in *Ring Around the Moon.*

Study Anouilh's directions for music in *Ring Around the Moon*. Select (or compose) music to fit those scenes. Justify your reasons.

Research the history of marriage in late eighteenth-century Europe, then write an essay describing what economic and social functions it served. Do any of these functions exist in today's United States? Which ones and in what segments of society?

Compare and Contrast

1947: Extensive nationalization of French industry becomes well established.

Today: The French government retains considerable influence over key segments of each economic sector, with majority ownership of railway, electricity, aircraft, and telecommunication firms, but since the early 1990s has been gradually relaxing its control over these sectors.

1947: With the Truman Doctrine of March 12, a policy of world communist containment by the United States is formally announced, an early landmark of the Cold War.

Today: The Cold War is officially ended but is threatened again with the conflict in Yugoslavia Russia aligned with Serbia, Europe and the United States aligned with elements against Serbia. The Cold War is heated up further when U.S. bombs hit the Chinese embassy in Belgrade.

1947: The American Marshall Plan, named for secretary of state, George C. Marshall, channels huge quantities of money into rebuilding Europe and strengthening anticommunist European governments.

Today: A united, noncommunist Europe launches its first common currency, the Euro.

1947: France greatly expands its welfare state.

Today: France continues to refrain from cutting social welfare benefits and the state bureaucracy, preferring to trim defense spending and raise taxes to keep its deficit down.

What Do I Read Next?

Much Ado About Nothing, is a comedy by William Shakespeare, written about 1598-1599. Like Ring Around the Moon, this is another play of mistaken identities and happy couplings at play's end.

As You Like It is a comedy by William Shakespeare and first printed in 1623. This is yet another of Shakespeare's plays involving mistaken identities and an ending with a happy double marriage.

The Marx-Engels Reader is an anthology of the writings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, published in 1978. Of special importance to the issue of class warfare is "Manifesto of the Communist Party" (1848).

The Wealth of Nations by Adam Smith was originally published in 1776. It is arguably the most important work in support of capitalist theory ever published. Smith's work is still quoted.

Pride and Prejudice is a novel by Jane Austen first published in 1813. While there are no mistaken identities in Austen's work, the place of marriage in class relations is of central importance. One important difference between Anouilh's play and Austen's novel is the latter's emphasis on gender, specifically how women are forced by society to seek marriage in order to escape poverty or secure economic well-being.

Further Study

Chiari, Joseph, *The Contemporary French Theatre: The Flight from Naturalism,* Macmillan, 1959.

Chiari's text charts the course of French theater from Naturalism to Realism to Theater of the Absurd.

Curtis, Anthony, *New Developments in the French Theatre*, Curtain Press, 1948.

Curtis's subject, like Chiari's, charts varied approaches toward achieving realistic theater.

Grossvogel, David I., *The Self-Conscious Stage in Modern French Drama*, Columbia University Press, 1958.

Grossvogel concentrates on psychological aspects of late nineteenth and early twentieth century French theater.

Kuritz, Paul, *The Making of Theatre History,* Prentice Hall, 1988.

Kuritz's ambitious study encompasses Asian and Occidental theater. The book is organized according to time period beginning with ancient Greek Theater and proceeding to the present.

Bibliography

Anouilh, Jean, *Ring Around the Moon*, translated by Christopher Fry, Oxford University Press, 1950.

Archer, Marguerite, *Jean Anouilh*, Columbia University Press, 1971.

Delia Fazia, Alba, Jean *Anouilh, Twayne*, 1969. Falb, Lewis W., *Jean Anouilh*, Frederick Ungar, 1977.

Mclntyre, H. G., *The Theatre of Jean Anouilh*, Barnes and Noble, 1981.

Pronko, Leonard Cabell, *The World of Jean Anouilh*, University of California Press, 1961.

BOOKRAGS

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