The Ruling Class Study Guide

The Ruling Class by Peter Barnes

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Introduction

Peter Barnes's *The Ruling Class* exploded onto the theatre scene when it was produced in Nottingham, England, in 1968. Its acerbic wit and tightly woven plot openly criticize England's social hierarchy, specifically targeting the foibles and greed of the upper□the *ruling*□class. Barnes's play peels back the veneer of respectability to reveal the ugly underneath, the rot that can exist at the very core of a life of privilege. The protagonist of the drama, Jack, the Fourteenth Earl of Gurney, is insane: he thinks he is Jesus Christ. His creed of Love proves completely unacceptable to the rest of the Gurney family, who try to get him committed so that they can take over the family estate.

Jack Gurney represents goodness, and it is for this breech of common sense that he does not fit into upper crust society. Ultimately a doctor of psychiatry succeeds in transforming Jack into a true Gurney□by the end of the play Jack believes he is God the Avenger, or Jack the Ripper, whose program of punishment and murderous intent is more consistent with the values of the ruling class. Thus the play ends unhappily but remains a comedy rather than a tragedy because of its quirky shifts in mood and its juxtapositions of music, dance, and playful dialogue; while it is a form of social criticism, it never appears to take its topic too seriously.

Relatively unknown until this play appeared, Barnes gained almost instant recognition as one of the moving forces in British theater after the production moved to London. The play came at the height of the 1960s counterculture movement, when the youth of the western world began to openly question the establishment. Barnes's irreverent portrayal of upper class eccentricity, greed, and deviance fit in perfectly with the movement's ideals. Yet the playwright's ideas and facility with character have made *The Ruling Class* an enduring drama in subsequent decades as well.

Author Biography

Peter Barnes was born January 10, 1931, on London's East Side to parents of mixed religious backgrounds. His father was a British Protestant who willingly and rather superficially converted to Judaism to marry a Jewish woman. Although the family was not particularly religious, Barnes developed a fascination with the topic of religious belief and God, a fascination he explores in most of his major works. His other major theme is also believed to have originated from his family: an obsession with the ruling elite, its excesses and perversions□a contrast with his own working-class upbringing. Barnes did not finish secondary school and did not attend university but rather educated himself, believing that formal schooling corrupts the true artist.

Through his studies, Barnes developed a deep appreciation for Elizabethan playwright Ben Jonson (*The Alchemist*), considering his work superior to that of his contemporary William Shakespeare, whom Barnes found snobbish and pretentious in comparison to the more earthy Jonson. There are echoes of Jonson's straightforward plot lines and unaffected humor in all of the Barnes canon. Besides writing his own works, Barnes has adapted and translated plays that otherwise would not reach the English stage, including several Jonson plays and the Jacobean comedies of Thomas Middleton and John Marston. He has also produced and directed numerous works□including his own□for radio and television, especially for the BBC (British Broadcasting Company).

The BBC has supported Barnes's career by teaming him with some of the most accomplished actors in Great Britain for a radio series called *Barnes's People*. The original *Barnes's People* (seven monologues) and its sequels, *Barnes's People II* (eight duologues), *Barnes's People III* (seven plays for three voices), and *More Barnes's People* (more monologues) are "miniature" productions that feature stars such as Alan Bates, Claire Bloom, Sean Connery, John Gielgud, Ian McKellen, and Peter Ustinov. Barnes writes his plays in the Reading Room of the British Museum in London, where he can concentrate on his work, "cut off from disturbances, " yet still be able to look up and "see other people, so you're not isolated."

Barnes's most notable work for the stage is 1968' s *The Ruling Class*. The play received both the John Whiting Playwrights Award and the Evening Standard Annual Drama Award. Other plays of his that have gained critical and popular admiration include *The Bewitched* (1974), *Laughter!* (1978), and *Red Noses* (1985). Barnes has also written numerous works for film, including the screenplay adaptation of *The Ruling Class* in 1972. His other screenplays include a 1992 adaptation of Elizabeth von Armin's novel *Enchanted April*.

Plot Summary

Prologue

At the head of a long, formal banquet table, the Thirteenth Earl of Gurney presents a toast to England, "Ruled not by superior force or skill / But by sheer presence." As they drink, the scene shifts to his bedroom, where the Earl goes through his bedtime ritual: donning a ballet tutu and a three-cornered hat and swinging momentarily from a silk noose blithely prepared by his aged butler, Dan Tucker. Something goes wrong tonight, however, and the old Earl actually hangs himself.

Act I, scene i

The Earl's funeral is presided over by Bishop Lamptron, an asthmatic old man who appears magnificent in his stole and mitre.

Act I, scene ii

Back at the family castle, the family contends over who will inherit the estate. When the lawyer announces that it will be Jack, the Fourteenth Earl, Sir Charles, brother of the late Earl, and his wife Claire are aghast as is their dim-witted son, Dinsdale. Their protests are interrupted by Tucker, richer by the 20,000 pounds just bequeathed to him, who smashes a vase on the floor to get their attention. He announces Jack, the Fourteenth Earl, who enters, dressed like Jesus and spouting that he is God.

Act I, scene iii

Sir Charles brings in Jack's psychologist, Dr. Herder, to get Jack committed as a paranoid-schizophrenic.

Act I, scenes iv

Jack tells Claire that he knows he is God because when he talks to Him, he finds he is only talking to himself. Although there is logic to his madness, his ravings about love and equality are disturbingly "Bolshie" (communist) to his family.

Act I, scene v

Tucker tries to warn Jack that the family is plotting against him, but Jack repulses his "negativity."

Act I, scene vi

Jack reposes on a giant cross mounted to the wall while the others take tea. Two church ladies arrive to ask Jack to officiate at their Church party and are swept into a vaudeville chorus line with him. They want him to speak on a non-political topic, such as "Hanging, Immigration, the Stranglehold of the Unions." His talk of love□particularly as it pertains to sex□drives them away. Dinsdale suggests that if Jack would produce a legal heir, his relatives could control him. But Jack surprises them by announcing that he is already married□to the "Lady of the Camelias."

Act I, scene vii

Unsuccessful in convincing Jack he's married a myth, the family demands he produce a miracle. Jack tries to levitate a table but only the drunken Tucker sees it, just before passing out. Offstage there is singing; it is the Lady of the Camelias.

Act I, scene viii

Claire argues with Charles about his foisting Grace Shelley (who is playing the Lady of the Camelias at his bidding), his former mistress, onto Jack after first trying to foist her off onto his now-dead brother. But she demurs, realizing her husband' s game might work.

Act I, scenes ix

Grace and Jack perform a love ritual, tweeting like courting birds. Dinsdale pops Jack's joyful bubble by disclosing Grace's true identity. Once again, Jack repulses this "negative insinuendo," which he defines as "insinuation towards innuendo, brought on by increased negativism out of a negative reaction to your father's positivism." This confrontation with reality drives Jack to his wall-mounted cross for solace.

Act I, scene x

The Bishop and Sir Charles argue about Jack's marriage. Meanwhile, downstage, Dr. Herder seduces Claire after having learned that her husband sits on the board of foundation that may fund his research.

Act I, scene xi

Jack's time on the cross has purged him of doubts, and he blesses all and sundry, including the cockroaches, for it is his wedding day.

Act I, scenes xii through xv

The Earl plays the role of God in his own wedding. The marriage is consecrated with no one but the immediate family and Tucker to witness it.

The reception, too, is a lonely affair, with Bishop Bertie fretting about an actress daring to marry in white and Tucker "in his cups" (drunk). Sir Charles demands that they keep up the show, "The strength of the English people lies in their inhibitions.... Sacrifices must be made."

In their bedroom, Grace readies herself for her next "performance" and is panicked by the Earl's appearance on a tricycle. But he announces, "God loves you, God wants you, God needs you. Let's to bed." As the lights go out and the music swells, it becomes a successful wedding night.

Sir Charles and Claire interrogate Grace about her night, and she assures them that "His mind may be wonky but there's nothing wrong with the rest of his anatomy." Grace claims that she loves Jack. Dr. Herder admits that the "harsh dose of reality" of marriage might do Jack some good.

Act I, scene xvi

Dr. Herder stages a showdown designed to convince Jack he cannot be God. He has invited the insane McKyle, the "High Voltage Messiah," to "occupy the same space" as Jack. The encounter proves devastating to Jack, who convulses in agony with every shot of McKyle's imaginary volts. Claire herself convulses into labor, being nine months pregnant. When Jack comes to, he is reborn, calling himself "Jack"□to Dr. Herder, a sign of sanity. Upstairs the newborn baby cries.

Act II, scene i

Act II opens in the drawing room, where the latest Gurney is being baptized. The room decor is now Victorian, and the cross is gone. Jack, dressed in a traditional suit and carrying a shotgun and now only "slightly out of 'synch'," goes out for a constitutional. A shot is heard outside. Charles hopes Jack has "done the decent thing at last."

Act II, scene ii

Jack has shot a game bird, barely missing Tucker. He has a moment of intimacy with Grace and realizes that he's "got to stop talking" since the Master of Lunacy is coming to assess Jack's sanity.

Act II, scene iii

The "Master," Truscott, denies that he does the actual committing of lunatics, his "main concern is property and its proper administration." Things look bad for Jack until he begins to sing an old Eton song and Truscott joins in. He pronounces Jack recovered.

Act II, scene iv

In a mad speech, Jack reveals that he has adopted the persona of Jack the Ripper.

Act II, scene v

Mrs. Piggot-Jones and Mrs. Treadwell visit again, and this time the Earl impresses them with the idea that fear is the answer to society's ills. Once again, they break into dance, then Grace takes them on a tour as Jack symbolically slits envelopes open at his desk.

Act II, scene vi

Claire has stayed behind to keep Jack company□and to attempt to seduce him. The lights dim and the set dissolves to Whitechapel, Jack the Ripper's haunt. He stabs Claire. When the lights come up, the family discovers the body. Tucker is elated.

Act II, scene vii

Two policemen investigating the murder settle on Tucker as the culprit□opting for the traditional "the butler did it" solution. During their questioning, silverware he'd been hoarding drops out of his pocket, sealing his fate. Jack is cleared of any suspicion as Tucker is taken away.

Act II, scene viii

When he realizes that Jack murdered Claire, Dr. Herder attacks the Earl. The stress turns the tables on the doctor, who himself goes insane.

Act II, scene ix

Jack dons his robes to take his seat in the House of Lords. Charles suddenly ages. Grace gently chides Jack that they were more intimate when he was "batty," but she voices her conviction that he'll get around to her.

Act II, scene x

Alone, Jack groans and screams, madly.

Act II, scene xi

Jack rouses the House of Lords□mostly a pack or dummies and nearly dead old men□with a speech about the merits of punishment and order. Sir Charles shouts "He's one of us at last!"

Epilogue

Grace pulls Jack close as the lights fade. Her scream reveals that Jack the Ripper has struck again.

Prologue

Prologue Summary

The 13th Earl of Gurney, attending a formal banquet, proposes a toast to the glory of England. The National Anthem plays as the scene changes to the Earl's bedroom where Tucker, the Earl's manservant, helps him undress. Their conversation reveals that the Earl's father took the room's ornate bed all over the world with him. The Earl's older brothers have all been killed, leaving him with the title, and the Earl plans to get married again to someone named Grace Shelley in order to produce a new heir. There are indications that Jack, the Earl's son, is unsuitable.

As the Earl talks about the tedium of duty, Tucker prepares a noose of silk rope, hanging at just the right height, and a set of portable steps. The Earl orders his usual whisky and soda, and Tucker goes out. As he talks about memories of his father and of family traditions, the Earl dresses in a ballet dancer's skirt, a three-cornered hat and a ceremonial sword. He climbs the steps and then places his head in the noose. He talks about a woman whose love he remembers and comments on how worms are eating their way through her body. He calls her to him and then steps off the steps. He kicks and struggles for a moment and then puts his feet back on the steps. Gasping for breath, he speaks of the glimpses he caught of death. He wonders what more there is to see, realizes he's got time to try and steps off again. This time, he accidentally knocks over the steps and can't get himself out of the noose. He spasms violently, and then he dies. As his body swings at the end of the rope, Tucker comes in with whisky and soda on a tray. He sees the body and swears loudly.

Prologue Analysis

This play is a satire, a style of comedy in which the eccentricities, habits or beliefs of a particular group of people are exaggerated in order to illustrate how foolish or dangerous they are. In this case, the target of the satire is the British privileged class, those with ancestral money or titles or both. The prologue establishes the satirical tone early through clear references to the peculiar things that class does simply because they can, such as taking a bed all over the world and indulging in bizarre sexual practices like bringing oneself to the near-ecstatic point of near death. The formal term for this is auto-asphyxiation, and the informal term is kinky.

The Earl's death as a result of his kink comes as a surprise and a shock, and it functions on two key levels. First, it illustrates the play's point about the dangers of the kind of self-indulgence and self-absorption practiced by the privileged class. Second, it foreshadows similar shocks later in the play, particularly the death of Claire. Other foreshadowing includes the mention of Grace Shelley, who plays an important role in the play's later action, and most importantly the reference to Jack, who becomes the 14th Earl of Gurney and is revealed to be even more unusual than the 13th Earl.

Act 1, Scenes 1 and 2

Act 1, Scenes 1 and 2 Summary

Scene 1 - Bishop Lampton, dressed in full robes, reads the funeral service over the casket of the Earl. As he and the Earl's family sing a hymn, the Earl takes off his robes with Tucker's help and reveals himself to be a frail old man. The action of this scene flows into the next.

Scene 2 - The Bishop joins the rest of the Gurney family: Sir Charles, the late Earl's half brother; Lady Claire, Sir Charles' wife; and Dinsdale, their son. They discuss the strange circumstances of the Earl's death. Their conversation makes it clear that no one else is to know of these circumstances. They also discuss what's going to happen to the estate, and Dinsdale says he doesn't understand what they're so concerned about since the Earl left an heir, Jack, who will become the 14th Earl. Sir Charles comments on how awkward the situation is, and Claire wonders who the Earl appointed as guardian of the estate.

Tucker announces the arrival of Matthew Peake, the family's lawyer. Sir Charles asks Tucker to leave, but Peake suggests that he stay, indicating his briefcase. Sir Charles understands Peake to mean that he's got the Earl's will and allows Tucker to stay, insisting that Peake get on with telling them what the will contains. Peake wants to wait for Jack, but Sir Charles says that Jack is detained and won't arrive until later. Peake settles down and reads the will, which first of all leaves a large legacy to Tucker. At first Tucker doesn't respond, but as Peake goes on, Tucker suddenly jumps up, shouts happily, sings a rude song and runs out of the room. Sir Charles insists upon knowing what the will says about the estate, and Peak says that the Earl has left it all to Jack absolutely, appointed no guardian and added a clause that says if anybody contests the will the entire estate will be given over to charity. The family all begins shouting angrily.

Tucker comes back in, smoking a cigar and announcing the arrival of Jack. He comes in wearing a monk's habit. He graciously greets the members of the family, apologizes for being late and assures them he's come to take his proper place in the world and in the family. He then suggests they all pray, and as they uneasily go down on their knees, Jack tells them they should feel perfectly comfortable since they're talking directly to God, who happens to be in the room with them. He then tells them that he is God, and with increasing excitement, he lists the names by which God is known. The Bishop faints.

Act 1, Scenes 1 and 2 Analysis

In some satires, only one or two aspects of the satire's target are made fun of. In this play, more and more aspects of the privileged class's way of life and perspectives come under satirical attack as the action continues. This scene starts the ball rolling by

portraying examples of that class's shallowness, greed and the desire to preserve image and reputation. Meanwhile, Tucker's joyous reaction to his sudden wealth contrasts with the unhappy reactions of the others to the news that the will is not what they would like. It also foreshadows his increasingly brazen rudeness throughout the play.

The appearance of Jack sends the satire of the play in a new direction, taking the family eccentricities first glimpsed in the character of the 13th Earl and making them even more extreme. Just how extreme they are becomes more and more obvious as the play continues, making the play's satiric point about the dangers of upper class self-involvement more and more dramatically.

Act 1, Scenes 3, 4, and 5

Act 1, Scenes 3, 4, and 5 Summary

Scene 3 - Sir Charles discusses Jack's case with Dr. Herder, the physician in charge of the psychiatric hospital where Jack was a patient. Herder says that Jack is a paranoid schizophrenic, interpreting the world solely on the basis of what he feels. He adds that the Earl insisted that Jack was not to be certified insane and that if Sir Charles wants Jack certified someone called the Master in Lunacy will have to sign the papers. The doctor also says that Jack isn't dangerous. Spending some time in the real world may actually help him. Herder also comments that Jack's suffering from delusions of grandeur. Because he's already a member of the British aristocracy, he thinks the only way he can be grander than that is to be God.

Scene 4 - Jack speaks a long, rambling speech to Claire, in which he explains his godly philosophy. This philosophy basically boils down to the idea that if everybody just felt their feelings and loved, there would be no more sin. When Claire asks how he discovered who he was, Jack tells her that one summer day outside a public urinal, he had an experience of brilliant light that brought to him an understanding of Universal Love. He tells a story of how a certain crab is transformed inside by the invasion of a certain parasite, but the outer shell is unchanged. He says this is what's happened to him.

Tucker appears, rudely announces Sir Charles and then goes out. Sir Charles says that Tucker will have to be fired, but Claire says he might be useful, since he understands Jack's situation. Sir Charles asks for Jack's signature on some papers that give him power of attorney over the estate, and Jack signs. Just as Sir Charles is sharing his triumph with Claire, he realizes that Jack has signed the name Mycroft Holmes, Sherlock's younger brother. Sir Charles reminds him that his name is Jack, but Jack insists that he not be called that. In a reference to his story about the crab and the parasite, he says that Jack is his "shell-name."

Tucker appears with the formal robes of a member of the House of Lords. Jack tells him to burn them. Sir Charles tells him he can't, and Jack says he can keep them if he wants. He is sure that after a time, though, Charles and everyone like him will abandon the way things are to follow him. He says that this means no longer bowing before those who don't deserve it and sharing property in a world where all men are equal. He and Tucker go out for a walk before lunch. Sir Charles angrily shouts that Jack is something worse than insane; he's a Communist.

Scene 5 - Jack rejoices in the beauty of the countryside while Tucker drinks heavily from a flask of alcohol and warns Jack to be careful around his family. He says they're plotting against Jack. Jack tells him to stop talking about plotting, saying that he's above all that now. He adds that Tucker has planted the seeds of negativity with his own socialist plotting. Jack disappears. Tucker gives a long speech about how Jack's

ultimately the same as everyone in his family, believing that what he doesn't want to believe just doesn't exist. He also talks about how he's a real Englishman, working hard for his living not like the people he serves. He then confides in us that he's a card-carrying communist, having worked in service over the years as a cover for plotting a revolution. He goes out singing a revolutionary song.

Act 1, Scenes 3, 4, and 5 Analysis

These three scenes dramatize the way that the growing tension between Sir Charles and Jack represents a larger social conflict. Even though Jack is insane, his points in Scene 4 represent the struggle for a larger truth to emerge from under the control of the privileged class, who rule from a selfish sense of power and entitlement. Tucker's apparently very disrespectful actions are also a manifestation of this conflict, with his long speech in Scene 5 taking the point into the political realm of rebellion and insurrection. The contrast between these two points of view and Sir Charles' vividly depicted selfishness makes the play's thematic point that the eccentricities and selfishness of the privileged, or ruling, classes are maintained at the expense of fulfillment for the lower, working classes.

Later in the play that idea is taken even further, showing how the ruling class is so indulged and so desperate to retain control that actual destruction is the result. This sense of the destructive power of privilege climaxes in the literal death of Claire and the spiritual death of Tucker later in the play.

At the same time, however, Tucker's comments about Jack suggest the possibility that even though Jack's insane and his beliefs are slightly more broad-based than the rest of the family, he's still as selfish and closed minded as they are. This observation of Jack's ultimate self-centeredness foreshadows his role in betraying Tucker to the police after Claire's murder in the second act. Herder's pointed comment in Scene 3 about the reasons Jack thinks he's God reinforce this idea further, suggesting that on some level members of the British ruling class consider themselves to be beyond the judgment of, and responsibility to, anyone but the Almighty. Meanwhile, his reference to the Master of Lunacy foreshadows the appearance of that character later in the play and plants the seed in Sir Charles' mind for the plot to have Jack declared insane and sent to an asylum.

Act 1, Scene 6

Act 1, Scene 6 Summary

This scene is set in the family living room, which now has a large wooden cross leaning against one wall. Jack is crucified on the cross, apparently asleep. Claire looks up at him as Tucker brings in tea. Dinsdale comes in, looking for Sir Charles. Claire says he's in the city doing business for the estate and probably also visiting his mistress. Dinsdale comments that some of the women of the community want Jack to open the village fair, and when Claire assumes that he told them it wasn't possible, Dinsdale reminds her that he's running for Parliament and needs to show the family flag at every opportunity. Claire tells him that if he's going to be in government, he has to learn how to make believable excuses. Dinsdale then asks where Jack is. Tucker indicates the cross, and Dinsdale, startled, drops his tea. Tucker offers Jack tea, and he climbs down from the cross to have a cup. Jack tells Tucker, who seems hung-over after his earlier drinking, to go to bed. Tucker goes out, and Jack starts eating muffins along with his tea, talking about how he's going to instruct the Pope to include dancing along with the Sunday prayers.

Tucker returns with two middle-aged women from the town, Mrs. Pigott-Jones and Mrs. Treadwell. Jack sweeps them into a dance and then introduces himself and the rest of the family. Mrs. Treadwell says they've come to ask Jack to open the town fair. Jack says yes right away and invites the women to stay for tea. Dinsdale and Claire watch nervously, and Claire eventually sends Dinsdale to find Sir Charles. Meanwhile, Jack lectures the women on the geographical smallness of England. He nibbles on the plastic grapes on Mrs. Treadwell's hat, preaches God's love and happiness and explains that the cross is actually an artifact from an African tribe of giants. This last is too much for the women, who rush out in terror chased by Jack just as Sir Charles is coming in. Sir Charles asks what idiot is responsible for bringing the women to the house. He quickly figures out that it was Dinsdale, comments that it won't be long before he's in politics and out of their hands and says it will be a relief since he's such a disappointment.

As Dinsdale comes in, Claire asks Sir Charles how the visit to the city went. Sir Charles explains that the only way they can get Jack out of the way and still keep the title in the family is to get him to marry and have a son. This would mean that the son could have the title once Jack was declared insane. Jack reappears, having heard the talk about his getting married. He says he can't be married again, revealing that several years ago he married a woman named Marguerite Gautier and that the 13th Earl kept it secret. As Jack is leaving, Dinsdale realizes that Marguerite is the name of "The Lady of the Camelias," and he and Sir Charles rush out to grab Jack.

Act 1, Scene 6 Analysis

The appearance of Jack on the cross and his conversation with the women of the village illustrate how increasingly extreme his behavior is becoming. Just when it seems that it can't get any more extreme, he concludes the scene with the admission that he has married a character from fiction. "The Lady of the Camelias" is the central character in a famous French novel by Alexandre Dumas in which a courtesan, or high-class prostitute, falls in love only to die shortly afterwards. A conversation between Claire and Dr. Herder in Scene 7 explains the relationship between Jack and Marguerite further.

Another aspect of the influence of the ruling class targeted by the play's satire comes into play in this scene when Dinsdale's political ambitions are revealed. His concerns about how perception of his family might affect his chances combine with comments from other characters to suggest several points. The first is that the privileged class' inclinations towards both control and self-preservation color desire for political power as well as for social power. The second is that Sir Charles, who represents attitudes of the privileged class in general, doesn't seem to care what anybody does as long as it doesn't adversely affect him. Finally, the comments from both Sir Charles and Claire about politicians represent the satirical opinion that politicians are essentially dishonest, do what they do because they can't do anything else and are just as irrelevant as the other members of the ruling class.

Act 1, Scene 7

Act 1, Scene 7 Summary

Claire and Dr. Herder discuss Jack's reasons for "marrying" Marguerite. Herder suggests that she dies in the name of the kind of love that Jack believes in but never experienced. As they move into the living room, Tucker is pouring drinks. Herder asks what Tucker thinks about Jack, and Tucker says he's no different from anybody else in the family, able to do whatever they want to do with no responsibilities. He then asks Herder to take a look at his bad back.

As Herder refuses Tucker, Dinsdale and Sir Charles come in, trying to prove to Jack that Marguerite is just a character in a book. Jack says they've proved his point, that his wife is written about because she is an ideal of love and that the books they're showing him are simply biographies. He goes on to say that next they will try to tell him he's not God. When Claire tells him exactly that, Jack says that people thought that the prophet Ezekiel was mad, but all the things that made people think he was insane were, in fact, God trying to get the people to look at the world in a different way.

Dinsdale demands to see a miracle, and Jack shows him his hand, which he describes as a miracle of construction. Dinsdale demands the sort of miracle described in the Bible, and although Jack disdains the idea, he tries to levitate a table. Everybody watches as Jack prays, speaking as though he can see the table rising. Tucker also says he can see it, but the fact that he's holding onto a half-empty bottle of whisky makes him somewhat less than credible to the others in the room. Claire says that since he didn't levitate the table, Jack has to realize that he has no wife. At that moment, however, a woman dressed as the Lady of the Camelias appears.

Act 1, Scene 7 Analysis

As the action of this act progresses, something very interesting is happening in terms of the way that audience and/or readers might perceive Jack. On the one hand, many of his actions indicate that he is clearly not of his right mind. These include the incidents of the grapes, the dancing with the ladies of the town and the levitation of the table. On the other hand, many of the things he talks about, particularly his views on love, begin to sound like genuinely valid alternative philosophies. In other words, it's beginning to appear that in the midst of the madness, part of him is genuinely a kind of prophet and is being rejected simply because he's different, in the same way that Ezekiel and Christ were rejected. It's possible to feel empathy for Jack, as well as compassion, in spite of Tucker's assertions that he's just like everybody else of his class.

The manipulations of Jack's family, which now includes the woman posing as Marguerite whose motivations are revealed in the following scene, increase the potential for empathy. All of this, of course, is preparing us for the shocking twist of Jack

killing Claire and betraying Tucker, both of which prove Tucker to have been right all along. Members of the ruling class, even the insane ones, can literally get away with murder.

Act 1, Scenes 8 and 9

Act 1, Scenes 8 and 9 Summary

Scene 8 - In the drawing room Claire and Sir Charles argue. Their conversation reveals that Claire knows that the woman posing as Marguerite, Grace Shelley, is Sir Charles' mistress. He tried to marry her to the 13th Earl so she could be conveniently nearby, and he's trying the same trick on Jack. Sir Charles explains that he knew that he could never convince Jack he wasn't married. He needed someone in a hurry to pose as Marguerite and called Grace, and she borrowed some costumes from a theater and came down to convince Jack to marry "her" again. Claire warns him that Herder might decide to declare Jack insane before the marriage can take place, and Sir Charles tells her to keep Herder under control.

Grace comes in, pleased with her performance but surprised to see the cross. Claire makes a sarcastic remark and goes out, leaving Grace to comment on what a cold person Claire is. Sir Charles explains that she just doesn't know what she wants. Grace says that she knows what she wants, to be Lady Gurney, and calls Sir Charles by a pet name. He warns her to watch herself, saying he's fond of her. She says he's got a funny way of showing it, trying to marry her off to his half-brother and then his nephew, but Sir Charles says he'll do anything to preserve the family. Grace sees Jack outside and makes somewhat crude comments about the prominence of her bosom. She reassures Sir Charles that she's got too much at stake to make a mess of things and goes out. A moment later Dinsdale comes in. He tells Sir Charles that Claire has told him the plan and says he doesn't think it's fair that Jack be fooled like this, adding that it isn't "playing the game." Sir Charles angrily tells him it's not a game. It's very, very real.

Scene 9 - Out in the garden, Jack greets Grace by referring to her as his dreams made real. He tries to speak French with her, and when it turns out that she can only speak English, he says there are other languages they can court each other in. He goes into a kind of bird language involving whistles and gestures, and Grace playfully joins in. After a while, Jack stops and asks Grace what else she wants from him, suggesting the Grand Canyon, a supply of communion wafers or absolution. She says she wants a white wedding. He suggests next Tuesday, and she offers to kiss him. He refuses, saying the last time he was kissed in a garden it was somewhat awkward. Grace realizes he means the kiss that Christ received from Judas and points out laughingly that Judas was a man. Jack asks who she really is, and she gives him her real name, Grace, which Jack says is a good name, meaning gift of faith. They speak romantically to each other about their ideas of happiness and paradise, singing a popular song as Jack ushers Grace off.

Dinsdale appears as Jack is watching Grace go and tells Jack about Sir Charles' plans. Jack puts his hands to his face in shock, and a stage direction indicates that when he removes them, his face is covered in white makeup. He cries out in pain, demanding that Dinsdale stop being so negative. He goes inside and has a kind of breakdown, his

words becoming nonsensical and his pained cries increasing as he climbs back up on the cross and shrieks about how he's not paranoid. Dinsdale runs out. The lights fade to black, and Jack's cries stop abruptly.

Act 1, Scenes 8 and 9 Analysis

As the character of Grace is introduced, these scenes illustrate not only her effect on Jack but also her relationship with the family as a whole. It becomes clear how she and Sir Charles use each other as a means to achieve their own desires, Grace for higher status and Sir Charles for control over Jack and the estate. It also becomes clear in the reference to Judas how Grace is eventually going to betray Jack to the rest of his family, and finally it is revealed how the truth of her identity and what she wants sends Jack into a frenzy. All this represents the way that both the privileged classes, as represented by Sir Charles, and lower classes, as represented by Grace, can become ruthless in pursuit of their goals.

The symbolic meaning of the cross specific to this play begins to become clear as a result of this scene. By its very nature, it represents both the humiliation that Christ suffered and his ultimate sacrifice. Its presence here, however, takes on an ironic aspect when it is juxtaposed with Grace's comments about Judas. At that moment it becomes clear that the cross represents the way Jack is being sacrificed not for the good of humanity the way Christ was, but for the good of his selfish, grasping family. The play's satire, which up to this point has been pointed but generally superficial, begins to take on a deeper, darker aspect in this scene, becoming even darker as the action proceeds.

Another way that the play's tone begins to change is represented by the stage direction about Jack's face being covered in white makeup. This is the first of several instances in which the play's level of reality changes into something more representative of Jack's state of mind. The white makeup illustrates in a heightened, non-realistic way, his shock and fear at what Dinsdale tells him about Grace. It also reinforces the way his incoherent babblings reveal the fragmented, dissociated, confused state of his psyche. This point in the play marks the beginning of Jack's increasing difficulty in maintaining control of himself. Detours into similar non-realistic explorations of his mental state increase in frequency and intensity until they climax in his killing of Claire and the final moments of the play in which Jack's emotional expression becomes completely nonverbal.

Act 1, Scene 10

Act 1, Scene 10 Summary

The Bishop and Sir Charles set the date for the wedding, with the Bishop expressing serious doubts about the suitability of both the plan and the bride. He's convinced that Jack will fully recover his sanity, and when he does, he'll be horrified to discover the kind of woman he's married. Sir Charles is just as convinced that Jack is not going to improve and that his plan for the marriage is the only way the family's title and reputation can be preserved. He adds that Dr. Herder agrees with him and suggests that marriage will be the making of Jack.

Meanwhile, Claire tells Herder that she thinks Sir Charles is an idiot for disguising Grace as Marguerite and arranging the resultant wedding. Herder comments that Sir Charles is on the board of a prominent foundation, and Claire recalls that Herder has applied for a grant from the same foundation. After Herder explains the research that he's applied for the grant for, relating to triggering threatened responses in rats, he says that human responses are just as easily triggered. He adds that his theories and techniques will one day have to be tested on humans. Claire asks flirtatiously whom he'll do his tests on. Herder says himself. Claire pretends to trigger him, and he kisses her hand.

Act 1, Scene 10 Analysis

The first part of this scene, between Sir Charles and the Bishop, sets up and therefore foreshadows the main action of the rest of the act, the quick marriage between Grace and Jack. The second part of the scene, between Claire and Herder in which Claire is seen following Sir Charles' instructions to keep Herder occupied, sets up two important plot elements that come into play after the wedding. The first is Claire's flirtatiousness, which can be understood to come from a source other than a desire to follow Sir Charles' instructions. It also comes from loneliness in the face of Sir Charles' affair with Grace, and as such foreshadows her flirtation with Jack, which in turn leads to her death.

The second plot element is Herder's grant application, which plays a role in his actions in the second act. Meanwhile, his descriptions of the rats and of the tests he's putting them through clearly echo what his family is putting through Jack. These echoes foreshadow Jack's growing paranoia in the second act and his growing inclinations towards violence, which culminate in the killing of Claire.

Act 1, Scenes 11, 12, 13, and 14

Act 1, Scenes 11, 12, 13, and 14 Summary

Scene 11 - Jack, who has been twitching on the cross this whole time, stops twitching. He shouts out happily that he feels better and that he wants to bless everything from crawfish and trout to the Society of Women Engineers. Finally, he shouts that it's his wedding day.

Scene 12 - The entire family, including Tucker, gathers for the wedding. The Bishop appears in full robes. Grace appears in a white gown accompanied by Sir Charles, and Jack appears in a formal jacket but wearing no shirt. The Bishop reads the introduction to the traditional wedding service that calls for anyone with objections to the marriage to "speak now or forever hold his peace." Tucker makes rude comments about the family, but then he becomes quiet. The Bishop then asks whether the bride and groom know of anything that might prohibit their marriage, and Jack says that some people think that he, as God, is married to the Virgin Mary. Both the Bishop and Sir Charles say the opinions of those people don't matter, and the Bishop tries to continue with the vows. Jack, however, inserts his own vows. The Bishop quickly jumps in and asks Grace to make hers, which she does. Rings are exchanged. The Bishop pronounces that Jack and Grace are husband and wife and falls to the floor exhausted. The action moves smoothly into the next scene.

Scene 13 - A buffet table has been set up. As everyone helps themselves to food and drinks, the Bishop repeatedly expresses his disbelief that someone like Grace would be married in white. Grace complains that there aren't many people there, but when Tucker calls her "her ladyship," she suddenly finds everything much easier to handle. Sir Charles proposes a toast to the bride and groom, and as Jack cuts the cake, Sir Charles takes Grace aside and tells her he's not comfortable about her sleeping with Jack. Grace angrily says that she's still his, even though he's given her away. Jack suddenly proposes a toast to all the lost books of World War I, saying that the silence without the stories is unbearable. He asks everyone to listen, and he's right. The silence is unbearable to everyone in the family. They all burst out talking. Jack explains to Grace that the silence is why he has to sing and dance and laugh. Grace adds, "Make love," shooting a meaningful glance at Sir Charles.

As Tucker sings and dances to an old popular song, Grace leads Jack off to the bedroom. When Sir Charles notices they're gone, several people including Tucker makes crude comments about what must be going on. Sir Charles tells them they must stop, saying that families like theirs have to set the standard for proper behavior. As he repeatedly wonders what Grace and Jack are doing, he says that the strength of the British is in their inhibitions, adding that on any street corner anywhere else, you can see people behaving badly. Finally he says that sacrifices must be made and shouts out his question - "what are they doing?"

Scene 14 - As Grace takes off her clothes, she delivers a long monologue in which she tells the offstage Jack that for a while she was a stripper but never really understood how people found it appealing. As she takes off her stockings, she throws them into the audience, commenting that in spite of having been a stripper, she'll be able to fit in with his family. Jack suddenly appears riding a unicycle. Shocked and surprised, she says he's being ridiculous. Jack tells her to not be frightened. Grace calms down, and Jack reassures her that God loves her and wants her. He takes her to bed.

Act 1, Scenes 11, 12, 13, and 14 Analysis

These four short scenes chronicle Jack and Grace's speedy wedding, a series of events that reaches its climactic point not in the actual ceremony and not in the departure of Grace and Jack for their bedroom, but in Sir Charles' speech at the end of the ceremony. His comments about setting standards are a clear illustration of the play's satiric point that for the privileged/ruling classes, reputation is everything. His repeated wonderings about what Grace and Jack are doing, however, indicate that in spite of his approval of British inhibitions he doesn't seem inhibited at all about venting his jealousy.

Exactly what is passing between Jack and Grace is revealed in Scene 14, or at least the preliminaries are. Although she's manipulating Jack just as much as the rest of his family, in this scene her sense of humor, straightforwardness and playfulness make her somewhat endearing in spite of her plotting. Jack is also endearing when he reassures her that God, meaning himself, loves her and wants her. This is, of course, a double entendre, or an ordinary phrase into which a suggestive meaning can be read. In this case, the commonly heard phrase that God loves you takes on a tinge of eroticism, given the way in which God/Jack seems to be about to love her.

Jack's unusual toast in the middle of the wedding festivities is another moment in which empathy for him and his situation becomes possible. It's clear that for him, silence is truly unbearable. For the others, it's merely uncomfortable, but for Jack it means being alone with himself and with his truth. Since the action of the play has made it clear that truth is something that Jack simply cannot abide, his admission that he fills the silence with expressions of joy is genuinely poignant and endearing. This sets us up even more for the shocks to come in the second half of the play.

Act 1, Scene 15

Act 1, Scene 15 Summary

Grace comes down for breakfast and meets Sir Charles, who insists on knowing what happened between her and Jack. She cheerfully tells him that in spite of everything that seems to be wrong with Jack, sexually he functions just fine. Claire comes in and asks Grace exactly the same question, but Grace tells her to mind her own business. As Grace and Claire begin to argue, Herder comes in followed by Tucker. Tucker complains that Herder won't look at his bad back and then announces that breakfast is served and goes out.

Herder says he's come to offer his congratulations, and Sir Charles introduces him to Grace, whom Herder calls Lady Gurney. Grace behaves graciously, apologizing for not inviting Herder to the wedding but saying that she realizes that he probably would have tried to talk her out of it. She says that would have been useless, adding ironically that she loves her husband. As she goes out for breakfast, Herder immediately takes Sir Charles and Claire to task for allowing the wedding to happen at all, saying it's probably not even legal. Sir Charles reassures him that it was absolutely legal and goes out.

Claire congratulates Herder on getting his grant. He accuses her of making love with him to ensure he didn't cause any trouble. She then accuses him of seducing her to get the money, adding that the wedding would have gone ahead anyway. As soon as Grace has a male baby, Jack will be committed, and the only way Herder can change things is to declare Jack sane. She then says he hasn't got much time, since Grace is likely to become pregnant quickly. Herder swears at her.

Act 1, Scene 15 Analysis

The lengths to which the family will go in order to preserve their power and reputation become clearer than ever in this scene. Sir Charles is willing to endure the pain of having a woman that he obviously cares about have sex with another man, while Claire is willing to have sex with someone who is almost a stranger in order to ensure he says nothing about what he knows is going on. In other words, this scene makes it clear that the privileged/ ruling class is morally corrupt, with the manifestations of that corruption becoming less amusing and more frightening as the action of the play continues.

Herder at this point in the play represents the audience's perspective, in that he feels the distaste for the family's actions that the audience is clearly meant to feel. Herder, however, is in a position to do something about it, which he does in the following scene. We, in terms of the play and the antics of the ruling class in real life, can only watch.

Act 1, Scene 16

Act 1, Scene 16 Summary

Nine months later, Grace is hugely pregnant. She joins Herder, Claire and Dinsdale, who watch as Jack follows her in, walking and behaving in the same way she does. Herder explains that sympathetic pains felt by the husband of a pregnant wife aren't uncommon. Tucker comes in and announces a man named McKyle. Herder tells Tucker to show him in, and Tucker goes out. Herder hurriedly tells Claire and Sir Charles to stay and to not interfere with what they see unless he asks them to. He explains that he's going to conduct an experiment. He then says to Jack that he's going to show him the light of truth.

McKyle comes in and introduces himself as the High Voltage Messiah, saying that everything he eats and drinks is converted into electricity and pointing to the outlet on his forehead. Herder asks him specifically if he's God, and McKyle confirms it. Jack says that he's God, and McKyle says he blows his nose on men like him. They argue with increasing ferocity about which of them is the real God. McKyle "fires" electricity at Jack, and both he and Grace double over with pain. Sir Charles panics at the thought of losing the child. McKyle tries to recharge himself by sticking a finger in a light socket, and Dinsdale rushes in with the exciting news that there's going to be an election. Jack cries out, and everybody realizes he's climbed up onto the cross. Sir Charles and Claire exit with Grace. Herder tells Tucker to make sure that McKyle doesn't leave, and Dinsdale asks to know what's going on. Before anyone can answer, Herder comes back in with Claire, explaining that Grace is in the hands of a good midwife and that it's important to follow the confrontation between the two Gods through to the end.

McKyle and Jack argue as though they're in a courtroom, with Jack saying he's God because he's full of love and McKyle arguing that he's God because he's full of power. Herder says he can't believe in a God of love because of some of the awful things he's seen people do to each other. This makes Jack come down off the cross, putting bandages over his eyes and saying that God sometimes turns his back on his people in order to make them see the truth. Herder rips the bandages off his eyes and confronts him with the truth that he is Jack Gurney, 14th Earl of Gurney! As Jack writhes in pain, Herder mercilessly confronts him with the facts of what his family did to him. Jack calls himself The Father, but Claire jumps up and says he's the father of nothing. McKyle fires at him with his hands clasped in a pistol shape. Jack screams, and suddenly a huge monster appears, attacks Jack, beats him, throws him onto the floor and leaves.

In the silence that follows, a baby's first cry is heard. Herder helps Jack to his feet. Jack realizes that his name is Jack and repeats the fact over and over as Sir Charles comes in with the happy news that Grace has had a baby boy.

Act 1, Scene 16 Analysis

This scene is the climax of the first act, as Jack is violently confronted by the truth in two ways. The first is through the actions of Herder, who by challenging him with someone else who thinks he's God, forces him to face the possibility that his perceptions of both himself and his place in the world are wrong. This leads to the second confrontation with the truth, as portrayed through the incidents with the bandages and with the monster. These are additional examples of the technique first employed in the scene in which Jack's face becomes white with makeup, exploring what's happening to Jack by making his internal conflict external. The bandages are a physical representation of what Herder is trying to do to Jack's psyche, tearing away delusion and revealing the truth. The monster is a depiction of that truth, showing up in all its violent hateful glory and pummeling Jack into submission. Meanwhile, Herder's insistence upon conducting the experiment is a response to his feelings of having been made a fool of by Claire, showing her and the family that he is a true scientist and not just a pawn in their games.

Sir Charles shows up with the baby at exactly the moment when the baby is made redundant by Jack's apparent return to sanity. Clearly, Jack will not be committed now, at least not for the foreseeable future. This sets up the conflict of the second act, in which Jack struggles to hold onto his sanity and Sir Charles struggles to gain control of the estate.

Act 2, Scene 1

Act 2, Scene 1 Summary

The flash from a photographer's camera briefly lights up on all the characters but Jack, gathered for the christening of the baby. A moment later we're in the drawing room, where the cross is now gone and ornate Victorian furniture and ornaments have appeared. Everybody comments on how well the christening went, with Grace adding as she leaves that the baby has completely saved the family. When she's gone, Herder debates with the others about whether Jack is to be declared insane and permanently committed, saying he's convinced that Jack is on the road to recovery. Sir Charles is determined to have Jack put away. Claire is unconvinced either way. Grace returns, having handed the baby off to a nurse. She's just in time to hear Herder talk about how important "the Earl" is to his research.

From the doorway, Jack says he's to be called Jack. He holds a shotgun on the group for a moment, says "click" and then comes into the room and apologizes for missing the christening. He says he feels it's important to be feeling a hundred percent before appearing in public. As he talks, at this point and throughout the rest of the act, gibberish words suddenly overwhelm his speech, and he has to fight to regain control. He urges the family to be patient with him.

Tucker brings in his coat and hat, reminding Jack that he wanted to take a walk. Jack puts them on, reminding Tucker that they both have to be on their best behavior because the family wants to get rid of them both. After they've gone, Claire says that it seems to her that Jack is definitely recovering, but Dinsdale disagrees, saying that the sudden attacks of gibberish are signs that he's relapsing. Herder tries to convince them all that the process of recovery can't be rushed, saying the decision to commit him is Grace's as Jack's wife. She confesses she can't make up her mind, but Sir Charles says she doesn't have to, because he's already asked the Master of Lunacy to come down and certify Jack insane. Suddenly a shot rings out from outside, and Sir Charles wonders hopefully whether Jack has finally done the right thing and killed himself.

Act 2, Scene 1 Analysis

Once again Sir Charles, who seems unwilling to consider anything other than what he wants as valid, represents the ambitions and ruthlessness of the privileged/ruling class. At the same time, empathy for Jack is again aroused as he clearly struggles to maintain control over his newfound sanity. That empathy becomes even stronger at the realization that Jack is fully aware of the net of his family's desires closing around him, adding pressure to his already precarious stability.

Pressure comes from another area unrelated to the family in the form of Herder's ambitions. To him, Jack is becoming less of a human being and more of a lab rat,

suggesting that to him Jack is ultimately as dispensable as he is to his family. This suggests the possibility that scientists are themselves a kind of ruling class, protective of their ambitions and positions in the same way as the privileged class.

The Victorian furniture and ornaments are representative of a subconsciously growing element of Jack's insanity, the delusion that he is Jack the Ripper, a serial killer who notoriously killed and maimed women in the Victorian Era. The increasing presence of Victorian atmosphere both foreshadows and symbolizes this delusion, which climaxes in the brutal murder of Claire in the same manner as the Ripper murdered his victims.

Act 2, Scene 2

Act 2, Scene 2 Summary

Feathers fall gently from the sky as Jack looks sadly at the dead dove he has just killed. Tucker urges him to be careful, at the same time taking a reassuring hit from his flask. Grace, Claire and Herder rush on to find out what's happened and see that Jack is all right. They become angry with Tucker for not taking better care of him. As Sir Charles comes on, Jack explains that he was trying to hunt the way he always thought people of their class were supposed to. He fires the gun into the air and hits someone who screams offstage. Sir Charles and Tucker rush off to see what's happened as Claire, Herder and Grace look suspiciously at Jack. He pleads again for more time, but Herder tells him that Sir Charles has asked the Master of Insanity to come and commit him, adding that whether it will actually happen depends on how Jack behaves. Jack urges them all to go in and get warm, saying that he wants to stay outside and collect himself.

Claire and Herder go in, but Grace waits, checking to make sure that Jack is all right. After Jack tells her that marrying her was the best thing he's done, Grace goes inside, angry at Sir Charles. Jack talks to himself, struggling once again to maintain control. The gibberish words return, and Jack pulls out some tape and sticks it across his mouth. As his struggle for control manifests physically and he moves spasmodically, a shadowy figure appears in the background. This is the Master of Lunacy.

Act 2, Scene 2 Analysis

The dead dove functions as a symbol on several important levels. First, as indicated by Jack's comments about his class and hunting, the death of the dove represents the ruling class's capacity for killing and destruction. This means that the dove also represents Jack, who is in the process of being spiritually destroyed by his family. Finally, because the dove is traditionally a symbol of God's spirit, it represents the way that the spirit of God's love that was once so alive in Jack has died. This foreshadows his increasing lack of control and inclinations towards violence, all of which grow into the murderous rage that eventually kills Claire.

The way that Jack tapes his mouth and the mysterious appearance of the Master of Lunacy are again theatricalizations of the disorder of Jack's mind. These detours into insanity, for lack of a better phrase, occur with increasing frequency throughout this act and climax in the killing of Claire.

Act 2, Scenes 3 and 4

Act 2, Scenes 3 and 4 Summary

Scene 3 - The Master of Lunacy, Truscott, waits in the drawing room where there is even more Victorian atmosphere. Tucker dresses Jack in traditional British clothes and sends him inside, where he greets Truscott genially. Truscott tells him he's not actually there to formally commit him but to make a recommendation. Two doctors have recommended that Jack be committed, but Herder is against it. As Truscott takes snuff from a silver snuffbox, Jack struggles to retain control. Truscott asks him repeatedly whether he still thinks he's God, and for a while Jack is silent. Then, Jack begins to sing what sounds like an insane song. When Truscott joins in, it's revealed that it's their old school song. Their conversation detours briefly into reminiscences, but Truscott soon reintroduces the question of whether Jack thinks he's God.

Jack continues to struggle for control, as he explains that he's embarrassed to hear about the things he did when he was mad. He says he regrets all his wasted years and becomes angry about the way that Britain seems to be becoming less and less of what it was. As he continues, Truscott calls in Sir Charles, Grace and Claire and tells them in his opinion Jack has recovered. Grace kisses Jack. Truscott tells him that he hopes to see him at the next class reunion, congratulates Herder on his achievement and then goes out.

Sir Charles angrily comments that Truscott's an idiot, but Grace loses her temper and tells him to mind his own business. As she goes out, Herder advises Sir Charles to leave Jack alone. As Sir Charles angrily goes out, Claire congratulates Jack, but Herder tells her that Jack was very lucky, suggesting that his behavior represented what Truscott considered to be sanity rather than with genuine sanity. As Claire indicates that she's finding Jack attractive, Herder reminds her that she participated in Sir Charles' plan to have Jack declared insane. He then suggests that she leave him alone since he's been under a great deal of strain and needs very gentle treatment. He asks about their relationship, and Claire tells him it's over. As they go out, Jack is left very much alone.

Scene 4 - The action of the previous scene flows smoothly into this scene. Jack speaks a long, incoherent, violently phrased soliloquy in which he proclaims again that he's God. He realizes that a woman has betrayed him and that her punishment must be death, and he announces that he truly is Jack, listing all the nicknames of Jack the Ripper. He lists the names of Jack's victims, recites a gory nursery rhyme and then goes off, slashing the air with his knife.

Act 2, Scenes 3 and 4 Analysis

The question of what defines sanity is raised in this scene. Truscott bases his opinion that Jack is sane on qualifying factors that many would consider insane, specifically Jack's passionate, almost ranting, speech about the deterioration of England, which Truscott obviously thinks contains ideas that normal, sane members of the ruling class would have. In the satirical context of the play, he's absolutely right.

Taking snuff was a habit of men, and a few daring women, off and on for several centuries, finally dying out in the early 20th Century. Snuff was a tobacco product that was sniffed in pinches and carried around in ornate little boxes like pillboxes. At first glance it seems both anachronistic and unlikely that Truscott would actually take snuff, but it must be remembered that Jack's sanity is slipping and his delusion is growing. In that context, Truscott's taking snuff becomes another example of the way that Jack is interpreting the world according to his delusion, perceiving Truscott as a Victorian gentleman who would take snuff. This is another example of the way reality is shifting for Jack, a shift that becomes complete in Scene 4.

At this point, the play suddenly turns very dark as Jack's insanity begins to manifest in ways that are much less lightly charming than they were previously. As a result, the play's theme begins to emerge, warning that the ways of the privileged/upper/ruling classes are not merely frivolous but are downright dangerous. The manifestations of that danger appear in following scenes.

The mention in Jack's monologue of a woman's betrayal at first glance suggests that Jack is aware of Grace's reasons for marrying him, but it must be remembered that Jack was in the room when Herder reminded Claire that she participated in Sir Charles' plan to have Jack committed. This is the betrayal to which Jack is referring and which is the trigger for his rage to be unleashed on her.

Act 2, Scene 5

Act 2, Scene 5 Summary

In the drawing room, which is now completely furnished in a Victorian style, Grace and Dinsdale argue over whether she should have invited Mrs. Treadwell and Mrs. Piggot-Jones back. Dinsdale is concerned that if they see Jack insane again, his chances for election are ruined, but Grace tells him that Jack is completely normal. If the women see him as he is now, Dinsdale's chances will only improve.

Tucker shows Mrs. Treadwell and Mrs. Piggot-Jones in. Grace welcomes them and tells Tucker to serve tea. Dinsdale and Grace apologize for Jack's behavior during their last visit, and Jack comes in, soberly dressed and quite calm. Claire comes in as well and watches with fascination as Jack charms the two visitors, agrees with their disgusted opinion of sexual activity and also agrees with them that the death penalty should be reinstated. He then starts talking about bringing back torture and eventually lures the two women into willingly joining him in a silly song and dance. The visitors comment on how pleasant the visit is, and Jack agrees. Then, he excuses himself saying he's got work to do. He suggests that Grace and Dinsdale show them around the estate. As Grace and the women leave, the women comment on how they're sure that beneath his eccentricities, Jack is perfectly sound and sane.

Grace asks Claire if she wants to join them, but Claire says she wants to stay and keep Jack company. Grace hints that she's been keeping Jack company a lot, adding that he'll miss her when she goes. Grace leaves, and Claire watches Jack slitting letter after letter after letter with his knife. The action of this scene blends with the next.

Act 2, Scene 5 Analysis

This scene reiterates the point made by the scene with Truscott, that apparently those who believe in and support the belief systems of the upper classes perceive irrational attitudes as sane. Even more chilling than the way that the visiting women fall under Jack's spell is the way that he goes after his mail with the knife, a vivid reminder of his belief that he is Jack the Ripper and a powerful foreshadowing of the violence that transforms from unsettling fantasy into murderous reality in the following scene.

Act 2, Scene 6

Act 2, Scene 6 Summary

As Jack continues slicing open his mail, he and Claire discuss his behavior with the women. Jack explains how difficult his situation is for him, and Claire reminds him of what he said once about the importance of feeling. She talks about how difficult it is for people of their class to feel and recalls the excitement of feeling fear one night at her girl's school when there was a prowler. She touches him and asks him to wake up her feelings. When he tries to move away, she playfully puts on a Cockney accent and approaches him again.

The backdrop of the scene changes, indicating a London slum street in the late 1800s, the time of Jack the Ripper. Claire begins removing Jack's clothes, asking him to speak romantically to her. Jack, however, speaks in his disjointed random style, occasionally interjecting comments about dismembered flesh. Claire kisses him, and he takes out his knife and stabs her repeatedly, shouting that he's alive! Once Claire is dead, Jack gathers his clothes and goes out. As he does, the backdrop fades away, and we're again in the drawing room. After a moment, Tucker comes in. He discovers Claire's body and cries out in happiness that there's one less. Sir Charles, Dinsdale, Herder and Grace come in, discover the body and react in horror. Sir Charles turns to the audience and asks who's the "impudent clown" responsible.

Act 2, Scene 6 Analysis

The heightening tension in this scene could become nearly unbearable for the audience, as the transformations of the set, Claire's seductiveness and Jack's increasingly bizarre behavior build to a climactic explosion of mindless fury. As soon as Claire puts on the Cockney accent, the accent with which Jack the Ripper's victims probably all spoke, her doom is sealed as she triggers the most extreme reality shift that we, and Jack, have experienced to date. As shocking as the moment is, however, it's nevertheless the means to an end, the illustration of how much power and influence the ruling class actually has. This is clearly revealed through the action of the following scene, in which the investigation into Claire's death is diverted away from Jack, whose family reputation must be protected at all costs, and onto the innocent Tucker, whom the family clearly sees as expendable.

Sir Charles' comment takes the selfishness of the ruling class to a satiric extreme. Rather than being upset at the death of his wife, he's more concerned that someone would actually be so disrespectful as to kill a member of his family. In some ways, this line makes the play's satiric point as clearly as the action that immediately follows.

Act 2, Scene 7

Act 2, Scene 7 Summary

Two police officers, Brockett and Fraser, go over the notes of their investigation as they wait for the family to return from Claire's funeral. The Bishop, Sir Charles and Dinsdale come in, talking about how terrible a thing this is to happen. Grace comes in just as Brockett is asking Sir Charles about where Tucker was standing when they discovered Claire's body. Grace shows him, and Dinsdale comments that Tucker was drunk. Sir Charles says that Tucker should have been dismissed years ago and wonders if the police have had a word with Jack. Grace warns him to be quiet and then suddenly announces that she and Sir Charles were lovers. Sir Charles tells her she'll never be a true Gurney, and Grace says she'd rather be dead. Brockett asks whether Jack knows about the relationship, and Grace says he doesn't, adding that nobody had better tell him.

Jack comes in dressed in black, calmly warns everyone to behave and tells Dinsdale he should go answer the letters of condolence even though Sir Charles feels he shouldn't have to. Dinsdale goes out, and the police question Jack about the circumstances of the murder. At that moment, Tucker is heard singing offstage, and Fraser brings him in. Tucker demands to be let go since he's got a plane to catch, but the police keep him there, revealing that he's a member of the communist party. They search him and his luggage and discover a large amount of family silver, several pieces of communist-inspired literature and some pornographic photographs. Tucker protests again that he's innocent and pleads with Jack to support him. Jack, however, says that Tucker is guilty and tells the police to arrest him. Tucker loses control, calling Jack a traitor and shouting that the family wants to get rid of him because he knows too much about the goings on of the upper classes. Fraser and Dinsdale drag Tucker out of the room, still shouting.

Brockett apologizes to Grace for letting Tucker go on, but Grace says it's all right because now nobody can have any doubts about Jack's sanity. Brockett then excuses himself, saying it's been a pleasure to meet the family and that they've shown him what real class means. He goes out with Sir Charles. The Bishop and Jack talk about how Claire's soul has flown to heaven, and then the Bishop tells Jack that he's restored his faith in both God and the family. He and Grace exit, leaving Jack alone. The action of this scene blends with the next.

Act 2, Scene 7 Analysis

This scene contains the play's thematic climax, the point at which its warning of the true dangers of the ruling class is most vividly portrayed. Jack's betrayal of Tucker, who admittedly doesn't help his own case much, represents the way in which the ruling classes will say and do anything in order to protect their status. It could be argued that Jack does what he does because he's insane, but that is also an element of the play's

thematic point, that the power and obsession with it that dominates the ruling class's thinking is in fact a kind of insanity. Brockett's exit line about how the family has shown him what real class is, is ironic in the extreme, since everything we've seen of the ruling class to date has shown how they're anything but classy. The rest of the play from this point is falling action or denouement, as Jack and the rest of the family cope with the new situation.

Act 2, Scenes 8, 9, 10, 11, and Epilogue

Act 2, Scenes 8, 9, 10, 11, and Epilogue Summary

Scene 8 - Herder comes in to speak with Jack, who is watching Tucker being taken away. He says it's impossible for Jack to have killed Claire, saying that he's been cured and is now accepting of the world on its own terms. Jack agrees, but when Herder says he wants to know what happened to Claire, Jack responds with graphic comments about how her body is rotting. Herder suddenly lunges at him, accusing him of being the killer. Jack fights him off, accuses him of being Claire's lover, insists he's cured and tells Herder that the doctor has become just as paranoid as he once believed Jack to be. He then pushes Herder to the floor and goes out, saying that if there's a trial he's to tell the truth, that Jack is completely normal. Herder convinces himself that he was just imagining things, that his anger about what happened to Claire colored his judgment. He goes out, carrying with him the cardboard outline of Claire's body from the floor.

Scene 9 - Grace and Sir Charles meet Jack in the garden, where they talk about how much of a shock it must have been to Jack to discover that Tucker, someone he's known and trusted all his life, is a killer. Grace tries to get Sir Charles to apologize for all the awful things he said about Jack, but Sir Charles says he did what he had to do and that Jack understands. Jack says he'll never forget what Sir Charles did, or Grace either, and then announces that he's going to take his place in the House of Lords. Dinsdale comes on with his robes, commenting that they'll be able to help each other now that Dinsdale's in Parliament and they both agree on so many things. Sir Charles worries about what will happen if Jack has a relapse, but Grace says she supports Jack a hundred percent. Jack reminds Sir Charles that he's the head of the family, and Dinsdale and Grace join him in telling Sir Charles to mind his own business.

Sir Charles suddenly ages, his hair going white, his hands shaking, his posture stooping, as he shouts about how ungrateful they all are for everything he's done. Dinsdale takes Sir Charles away, and Grace comments on how Jack really seems to have come into his own. She hints that they should make love soon, and often. As they talk, Jack refers to her as Annie, the name of one of the women killed by the Ripper. Grace is suddenly worried, but Jack reassures her that he's just nervous about his appearance in the House of Lords. Grace comments that he'll "kill 'em," meaning that he'll make a great impact, and then comments that she can't wait until he gets around to her. He tells her to leave him to gather his thoughts, and as she goes, she reassures him that he's "one of them," that they'll adore him and that she loves happy endings. Music plays as the scene changes.

Scene 10 - Jack puts on his robes, speaking complete monstrous nonsense as the scene changes again.

Scene 11 - In the House of Lords, represented by benches filled with decrepit mannequins covered in cobwebs representing the Lords, three aged lords talk about the

increase in immorality in England and how the offenders should be punished harshly. Dinsdale and Sir Charles, who now walks with the help of a cane, appear and listen as Jack makes a speech proclaiming that he feels as though this is where he belongs, as part of the natural order in which God rules by fear. He proclaims that the strong must manipulate and control the weak. He says the idea of living in God's love is a perversion of the natural order and quotes a rousing speech from Shakespeare's *Henry V*. The Peers and Dinsdale cheer, with Sir Charles shouting that he's one of them at last.

Epilogue - As the cheering subsides, Grace appears in a sexy nightgown singing a flirtatious song. Jack embraces her as the sounds of cries from the street, similar to those heard when Claire was killed, are heard again. Jack reaches into his pocket. Lights fade to black, and then suddenly Grace screams in terror and agony.

Act 2, Scenes 8, 9, 10, 11, and Epilogue Analysis

The action of this sequence of scenes flows smoothly in and out of each other in the same way as Jack flows in and out of madness. In this context, several lines and situations are chillingly ironic. Jack comments to Herder that he's completely normal. Grace comments that Jack will "kill" in the House of Lords, and Jack comments that he'll never forget what Sir Charles or Grace did for him. Sir Charles ecstatically comments that Jack is now fully and finally one of the ruling class. All of these are filled with irony. This sequence reiterates and solidifies the play's thematic point that the dangers of the ruling class are very thinly veiled and can manifest in more subtle ways than through the knifing of other people.

Also in this sequence, the action plays out more and more in a manner representative of Jack's mental state. The physical battle with Herder represents the psychological battle over Jack's sanity. The sudden aging of Sir Charles represents Jack's perception that he is suddenly and completely irrelevant, and the appearance of the Lords suggests Jack's view that their role is in desperate need of the kind of revitalization only he can bring. The play's final terrifying moments, suggesting the murder of Grace (a phrase that has both a literal and metaphoric meaning), indicate that Sir Charles was absolutely right, since Jack's destruction of the middle class woman who has supported him represents upper class contempt for middle class life and values.

The quote from *Henry V* is also ironic, since that particular play has for centuries been viewed as Shakespeare's most patriotically British work. Its use in this context suggests that in the minds of the ruling class, their self-obsessed way of doing things and viewing things exists ultimately for the good and power of England. The fact that the quote is spoken by an utter madman, however, suggests that the patriotism of self-righteousness, and the self-righteousness of patriotism, can, if taken to extremes, lead to insane and murderous behavior, a message that some would argue is all too relevant in today's world.

Bibliography

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Characters

Bertie

See Bishop Bertram Lampton

Detective Inspector Brockett

Called in after the murder of Claire, Detective Inspector Brockett discovers Lenin's books in Tucker's suitcase and therefore arrests him for the murder.

Detective Sergeant Fraser

Fraser is Brockett's assistant.

Sir Charles Gurney

Brother to the late Earl and uncle to Jack, the new Earl, Charles considers it is his family duty to get rid of Jack and take over the estate. He bickers with his wife Claire about how to eliminate his nephew and enlists the aid of his mistress to marry Jack and produce a legal heir he can control. He doesn't mind giving up his mistress, not being "the sensitive type," and is willing to sacrifice anything "for the family"□or rather for his own gain. He is blind to his wife's affair with Dr. Herder and his own son, Dinsdale, is a disappointment to him.

Lady Claire Gurney

Claire is married to Sir Charles, but that doesn't stop her from having an affair with Dr. Herder, which she undertakes to elicit his support in committing her nephew. She also attempts to seduce Jack when he begins to show signs of improvement. She displays a sophisticated, tough exterior when she blandly lets on that she knows of her husband's affairs. Claire is a caricature of the jaded grand-dame; she play-acts the role of a highborn lady while emptily pursuing the goal of saving the family name. She is a woman with no illusions.

Dinsdale Gurney

The dimwitted son of Claire and Charles who has the knack of upper class snobbishness but none of its class. Dinsdale reveals his father's plot to Jack, not out of honesty or distaste for the ruse but because he had been left out of the planning.

Dinsdale's biggest concern is whether Jack's madness will affect his position in Parliament.

Jack Gurney, the Fourtheenth Earl of Gurney

Jack suffers from delusions of grandeur and, already a member of the peerage, the only step up for him is God. Therefore, he calls himself God, Yahweh, the Infinite Personal Being, and sleeps on a cross. He urges everyone to pray for "love and understanding." When confronted with another paranoid-schizophrenic who also thinks he is the sole divine being, he goes through a metamorphosis, or rebirth, and emerges as Jack. Although his family considers this a cure, he really has exchanged a divine and holy identity for an evil and profane one: Jack the Ripper. In his madness can be found a quirky logic that endears Jack to others.

Gurney, the Thirteenth Earl ofGurney

The prototypical British Lord, the Earl is very proper and dressed impeccably, complete with medals of honor on his chest, as he presides over the meeting of the Society of St. George. He is a judge, a "peer of the realm," and the owner of a huge estate. He is about to marry a common girl, Grace Shelly, in order to provide his estate with an heir. He is eccentric and mentally unstable. He dies accidentally while enacting a hanging ritual, dressed in underwear, a ballet tutu, and a three-cornered hat.

Dr. Paul Herder

A German psychiatric doctor who comes to the Gurney estate at Sir Charles's bidding to assess the possibility of committing Jack to an insane asylum. While at the estate, he seduces Claire so that she will aid him in obtaining funding for his experiments in rat schizophrenia, since Claire's husband sits on the grant board. Herder refuses to commit Jack, preferring instead to observe whether the "harsh dose of reality" of returning to his family will cure him. When that fails, Herder arranges a showdown between Jack and the High Voltage Messiah, another paranoid-schizophrenic. When Jack turns violent and murders Claire, Herder himself goes insane in a classic case of "transference."

Alexei Kronstadt, number 243

See Daniel Tucker

Bishop Bertram Lampton

The Bishop, Claire's brother, is an imposing figure at the funeral of the Thirteenth Earl, but without his robes, he is a wheezy, balding old man who collapses after the slightest exertion. He conveniently fails to understand the circumstances of the Earl's death.

Master of the Court of Protection

See Kelso Truscott, Q. C.

Master in Lunacy

See Kelso Truscott, Q. C.

McKyle, the High Voltage Messiah

The High Voltage Messiah, the Electric Christ, the AC/DC God, is clinically insane, a paranoid-schizophrenic who thinks he is the God of electricity. He's been told that Jack thinks he too is God. McKyle has "obliterated hundreds o' dupe-Messiahs" before; now he, being a Vengeful God, disabuses Jack of his megalomaniac pretensions as well.

Matthew Peake

The lawyer who reads out the Thirteenth Earl's will to the amazed family.

Mrs. Piggot-Jones

One of two church matrons who ask Jack to preside over the opening of their Church Fete. The ladies get swept up into a singing and dancing chorus line with Jack. They are affronted by the sexual innuendoes of his "God is love" litany.

Mr. Shape

Mr. McKyle's "assistant," who is really his warden.

Grace Shelley

Grace is Sir Charles's mistress, who willingly takes on the role of The Lady of the Camelias, or Marguerite Gautier, (both martyrs for love and important symbolically to Jack) as a way of advancing herself. Charles sets her up with Jack to provide the next Gurney heir. She starts out by using Jack, but his quirky innocence earns her genuine affection.

Toastmaster

Every proper British club has its toastmaster, who raps for attention and repeats the toast in a stentorian voice for all to hear. The toastmaster is a well-dressed servant.

Mrs. Treadwell

Another of the church matrons offended by Jack's irreverent behavior.

Kelso Truscott, Q. C.

Truscott prefers the title "Master of the Court of Protection" over "Master in Lunacy" since his "main concern is property and its proper administration," after all. Things do not go well for Jack's assessment until he breaks into an Eton school song and Truscott joins in. Being old school chums, they share certain values, such as the need for discipline against the barbarians and homosexuals. Truscott's verdict is that Jack is cured and sane.

Daniel Tucker

The Earl's personal manservant is aging but knows his place until he learns of the 20,000 pounds the Earl has left him in his will. Unfortunately, he lacks the imagination to leave, and so stays on as the family butler, though now he drinks to excess and makes rude remarks to the "Titled Turds." He has an alternate identity: Alexei Kronstadt, number 243, a dues-paying member of the Communist Party; but he admits, he doesn't "do anything." He becomes an easy scapegoat for Claire's murder, since everyone tacitly agrees that "the butler did it."

Themes

Greed

Greed is evident in all of Barnes's characters save the insane Jack. In the first half of the play, he represents the opposite of greed: Christian charity and "the unity of universal love." Alas, this unrealistic solution to life's challenges defines him as clinically insane. The so-called sane members of the Gurney family, who vie for control over Jack's ownership of the estate, are all driven by greed. Sir Charles hopes to commit his nephew so that he can manage the estate and reap its power and riches himself, Claire compromises her integrity by staying with Sir Charles even though they both have other lovers, and the Bishop seems more concerned about the late Earl's promise of "the Overseas Bishoprics Fund" than about guiding the family spiritually.

When Sir Charles hears the reading of the will, which transfers the Gurney estate to Jack, he complains that his brother has "let his personal feelings come before his duty to his family." Charles would never let love get in the way of money. By contrast, Jack seems singularly disinterested in the value of his inheritance, spending his time meditating on his personal cross and urging the others to pray to the God of Love. In his madness, Jack adheres to better values than do his sane family members. In Grace the greed that drove her to adopt the persona of the Lady of the Camelias contests with her growing love for a man who treats her unlike her other lovers have done. As Claire announces nastily, Grace has made her living "on her back," trading sexual favors for social advancement and money. But Jack's "insane" insistence on love, his refreshing perspective, and his ingenuous love begin to win her away from greed to true love. Eventually, Grace doesn't want Jack "cured" out of fear that he will simply become another Gurney.

On the other hand, Tucker, who revels in his inheritance of 20,000 pounds, wants "more, more, more." He is caught red-handed with stolen silverware; this petty theft libels his character enough to make it easy to pin Claire's murder on him. Here is where the classes divide in Barnes's world: Tucker's greed sends him to prison, while the Gurney family's greed lands them in Parliament.

Insanity

According to Dr. Herder, Jack's insanity consists of not believing "what other people believe"; he can't see reality but has his own reality designed to win him love. He is a paranoid-schizophrenic suffering from delusions of grandeur, and, since he is already at the top of British society, he can only satisfy his megalomania by being God himself. His insanity, however, rests on a logical basis. He finds that when he talks to God he is talking to himself. He might have concluded, with the rest of modern western civilization, that God therefore does not exist, but he instead believes that he exists within himself.

As a peer of England with a vast estate, positions of honor, and a personal manservant, Jack is a kind of god. His God before his encounter with the High Voltage Messiah is the God of Love. He is peaceful and peace-loving, harming no one. But because he stands in the way of his family's greed, he either has to be cured or locked up, out of the way. When he transforms into Jack the Ripper, he declares that he has "finally been processed into right-thinking power." He is no longer "the God of Love but God Almighty. God the lawgiver, Chastiser and Judge." This new form of insanity is harder for the other characters to detect, for he acts like one of them. His reactionary speech at the House of Lords, a vitriolic plea to reinstate punishment as a way of controlling "the weak," leads Sir Charles to shout "He's one of us at last." In a sense, he is cured, as the Master of Lunacy has declared him. In fact, his newfound charisma proves irresistible to women□ both Claire and Grace desire him and Mrs. Tread-well and Mrs. Piggot-Jones follow him slavishly.

Insanity is often defined in terms of legal responsibility. One who is insane cannot be held legally responsible. Jack as the God of Love was irresponsible and a social misfit. Jack as the God of Justice is eminently responsible, a leader in the highest social and legal circles of the land. The question of his sanity raises the question of the sanity of England's social system.

Style

Juvenalian Satire

Satire's goal is to effect social improvement or at least chastisement for the follies of human nature. Although Barnes has stated that "nothing needs changing when it's all a joke," satire uses humor as constructive criticism. In *The Ruling Class* Barnes ridicules the pretensions of the upper class by exaggerating their pompous behavior to the point of absurdity. Thus the Thirteenth Earl carries the eccentric behavior of the stereotypical British lord to a ridiculous extreme self-hanging as excessive masochism. Barnes's form of satire is known as Juvenalian satire, named for the Roman satirist Juvenal whose biting satires exposed the vices of the Roman elite. Horatian satire, named for Horace,is gentler and more urbane. Juvenalian satire confronts its target viciously, with anger. In Barnes's version of this, no one is safe: from the bloated and sputtering Sir Charles and his dim-witted son, Dinsdale, to the grumbling butler Tucker and the two fatuous church ladies in grotesque hats each is a butt of the playwright's pointed ridicule.

Jack is not simply mad, he is mad with the arrogance of a peer of England, who considers himself so high up on the social ladder that the only conceivable form of megalomania available is to be God. *The Ruling Class* uses indirect rather than direct satire, the characters make outrageous statements whose merit they never seem to question; they do not criticize human foibles directly. Dr. Herder says with perfect seriousness that the one commandment a doctor should never break is "Thou shalt not advertise." His statement constitutes a cynical assessment about a corrupt society, because he eschews the lesser vice of advertising while committing the greater vice of adultery in the service of advancing his career.

Satire has never gone out of style. Barnes admires the seventeenth century Jacobean comic dramatists Ben Jonson, Thomas Middleton, and John Martson some of whose works Barnes has adapted for the modern stage. He is also influenced by George Bernard Shaw (*Man and Superman*), a master of satiric barbs; Shaw, Barnes tellingly opines, "was at his most serious when least serious, most meaningful when most playful." Likewise, the most humorous moments of *The Ruling Class* convey Barnes's deepest disapprobation of England's class system and its impact on the moral worth of its members.

Burlesque

In *The Ruling Class*, Barnes not only satirizes human folly, he does so with elements of burlesque, in which the style of the work does not conform to the seriousness of the subject. Burlesque differs from satire in the form or style of the work. While satire pokes fun, burlesque puts the work's style in opposition to its matter, such that an important topic is trivialized by its treatment, or vice versa. Burlesque can include unexpected

episodes of song or dance, as when Jack, Mrs. Treadwell, and Mrs. Piggott-Jones suddenly burst into a chorus line singing "The Varsity Drag." The song's lyrics outline the theme of adherence to social conventions: one must "learn how it goes" as the song says. Blind and instant conformance, as exhibited by the spontaneous dance and song, are burlesqued in both the action, instant conformity to ridiculous behavior, and the words of the song. When the church ladies meet Jack again, they join him in another vaudeville act, singing a bastardized version of the spiritual "Dem Bones," which celebrates the necessary hierarchy of the skeleton that can be broken on the wheel; the ladies join in because they agree with Jack's social solution.

Barnes also burlesques phrases and high-sounding styles of speech, often pillaging literary works or pop culture and turning the phrases to his own use. When Jack intones biblically at the House of Lords, his message comprises the antithesis of Christianity, "The strong MUST manipulate the weak. That's the first law of the universe□was and ever shall be world without end." Barnes parodies biblical style and turns its spiritual message inside out in a verbal burlesque. Moments later the mood of the musical comedy is burlesqued as Grace sings a ballad reminiscent of the love song from *The King and I*, and Jack responds by stabbing her to death. Thus burlesque itself is burlesqued into the grotesque, where serious matter is treated with gruesome frivolity. The result is devastatingly comic, as when Sir Charles responds to seeing his wife's corpse by saying, "All right, who's the impudent clown responsible for this?"

Historical Context

The Liberal 1960s

The 1960s were a time of defiant liberation in society, from politics, art, and music to dress, hairstyles, and morals. The "Liverpool poets" reflected the mood of elation and questioning in its poetry of pop culture, while music throbbed to a new beat and students took to the streets to protest all forms of oppression. Alongside the monolithic publishing houses, small presses sprang into being and thrived, producing avant-garde works in a distributed network of artists.

Inroads were developing into every aspect of culture; power was being redistributed. In England, where the noble class had always enjoyed prestige, the attitude of the middle class toward gentility (and toward the whole concept of gentility) moved from muffled but tolerant resentment to active disrespect. While much of the rhetoric of the 1960s was rancorous, Barnes's *The Ruling Class* introduced comedy to question the status quo. While the play does not urge social reform or raise an angry protest, it does prod the conscience□comedy being a gentle vehicle of liberation.

Theater

British theatre changed dramatically□if not swiftly□after Bertolt Brecht's Berliner Ensemble and his theatre of "alienation" or "estrangement" was introduced to London in 1956. In plays such as *Mother Courage and Her Children,* Brecht's "alienation effects" interrupt the dramatic flow of the plot through unexpected use of songs, music, cue cards, and asides to the audience by the players themselves. Although Brecht himself had died that year, his Marxist views and his interest in using theater to elicit social change were quickly embraced by the leftist playwrights working in London. Barnes admits the profound influence of Brecht on modern theater, and echoes Brecht's program of social reform when he says that his goal is "changing conventions, changing ideas, changing attitudes."

London theatre and Barnes were also affected by Samuel Beckett's "Theatre of the Absurd," which further questioned dramatic conventions such as plot and character; Beckett's best-known example of this is his *Waiting for Godot*. Likewise, Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty introduced the notion of expressionistic drama, a huge departure from the genteel drawing-room theater London had known until the 1950s. Musicals such as *Hair* (1967) and *Oh, Calcutta* (1969) introduced nudity and profane language to the legitimate stage. At first these theatrical developments shocked audiences, but by 1968 stage censorship had been abolished in England and audience interaction, open staging, anachronistic costuming, and revolutionary content had become standard fare; audiences now expected to be challenged as part of their entertainment.

In comparison to the intensity of experimentation in the work of Harold Pinter (*The Birthday Party*) and others during the 1960s, Barnes's level of innovation seems rather tame. Rather than seeking to shock, his plays aim to "disturb and entertain." Barnes picks and chooses among the fashions of the new theater, to create his own dramatic invention. The unexpected cuts to song and dance have a Brechtian flair, as does Jack's telling Dr. Herder that he will have to "leave the stage" if he cannot abide hearing about Claire's death. Like all of Barnes's work, *The Ruling Class* is highly self-conscious, aware of itself as a work of art, and forcing this awareness onto the audience as well.

The scene of Claire's murder has its roots in the Absurdist tradition, and Dan Tucker's card-carrying (but non-revolutionary) activities tip the hat toward the theatre of reform. *The Ruling Class* is an amalgamation of styles, with lines and references harvested from other works and humorously refashioned to Barnes's new purpose. The total effect has often been termed a kaleidoscope of dramatic action, fitting the fragmented experience of postmodern culture.

Critical Overview

The Ruling Class opened in Nottingham, England on November 6, 1968, thanks to the foresight of two readers on the British Arts Council—drama critic Martin Eslin and director Stuart Burge—who read the script and pronounced Barnes "a bloody genius." Burge took the play to Nottingham and directed it himself. At opening night, London's *Sunday Times* drama reviewer Harold Hobson felt himself "suddenly and unexpectedly faced with the explosive blaze of an entirely new talent of a very high order." Although he knew nothing of this playwright on that evening, he later wrote the introduction to the printed play, declaring that the performance he saw on its opening night was the perfect combination of "wit, pathos, exciting melodrama, brilliant satire, doubled-edged philosophy, horror, cynicism, and sentiment."

When it moved to London in February of 1969, Robert Bryden of the *Observer* pronounced *The Ruling Class* "one of those pivotal plays ... in which you can feel the theatre changing direction, a new taste coming into being." Bryden's colleagues at the *Spectator* and the *Evening Standard* disagreed; Hilary Spurling of the former dismissed it as "too boring to go into" and the latter's Milton Shulman called the play "essentially shallow and glib." In spite of the mixed reviews, the *Evening Standard* honored Barnes as 1969's Most Promising Playwright and he earned the John Whiting Award for the Nottingham production.

The Ruling Class premiered in New York in 1971, directed by David William, who praised Barnes for "the vision and the wit with which [he] has incarnated the life of the psyche: its tensions and paradox, hilarity and horror. For the play is both funny and frightening: a playful nightmare." Julius Novick of the *New York Times* also noted the play's psychological insights, stating that Barnes "has connected the perversions of privilege with the perversions of sexual feeling," which become "sources of both loathing and consequent power."

A year after the debut of *The Ruling Class* two other Barnes plays, *Leonardo's Last Supper* and *Noonday Demons*, opened as a double-bill. Irving Wardle of the London *Times* declared that now Barnes was confirmed as "one of the most original and biting comics working in Britain." The film version of *The Ruling Class*, released in 1972, earned Barnes more praise. Over the next ten years, Barnes cemented his status as one of the moving forces in modern British drama. He is considered an innovator whose critics do not always judge him by his standards but by the standards he is continually revising. Michael Billington of the *Guardian* praised him for having "broken the petty rules by which we judge plays."

Bernard Dukore, who has written two critical books on Barnes, *The Theatre of Peter Barnes* and *Barnestorm: The Plays of Peter Barnes,* placed the playwright alongside Harold Pinter and Alan Ayckbourn as "the playwriting giants of their generation in England." Although Dukore admitted that he remains in the minority in his choices.

Criticism

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

Critical Essay #1

Hamilton is a Humanities teacher at Cary Academy, an innovative private school in Cary, North Carolina. In this essay she discusses the ways in which the women's roles in The Ruling Class *reinforce its theme of social corruption*.

The liberated 1960s valued sexual freedom as a natural right, a legitimate form of expression for those who rejected the rigid morals of the previous generation and of the conservative "establishment." *The Ruling Class's* protagonist, Jack, in his God-is-Love state expresses complete sexual freedom, courting his mate like a bird and successfully impregnating her. As Grace attests, "His mind may be wonky, but there's nothing wrong with the rest of his anatomy." His sexual freedom is of a part with his innocence and open-heartedness. But his naive attachment to an idealistic and impractical philosophy of "love and understanding" makes him unfit to "take his proper place in the world. "He is "living in a dream world" (but then, according to Tucker, so are all rich people).

Jack's family desperately explores legal avenues of removing him, while he further terrifies them with his entreaty that they pray together. He defines prayer as "to ask, to beg, to plead." Of course, pleading is distasteful to those who command, who "kick the natives in the back streets of Calcutta." Jack cannot take his place in the ruling class until he accepts its systematic and brutal oppression of other classes and leaves off pleading to God or anybody else. When, through a form of shock psychotherapy, he is transformed to a reactionary and oppressive upper class gentleman, Sir Charles declares Jack "one of us at last." He has changed socially, but this change has wrought the perversion of his sexual nature, too. As God the Avenger (or Jack the Ripper), Jack punishes prostitutes, including the one woman who met his ideal, Grace Shelley.

The transformation of his sexual feelings parallels the transformation of his social being as he embraces the most distasteful aspects of ruling class behavior: ruthlessness and sexual deviance. In *The Ruling Class,* playwright Peter Barnes has, according to *New York Times* writer Julius Novick, "connected the perversions of privilege with the perversions of sexual feeling ... [which] is an important source of both loathing and consequent power." For Barnes, social power and social deviance are inextricably linked.

The perversions of sexuality and its inflection on the perversions of power and privilege reveal themselves in Jack's relationships with the female characters, Mrs. Piggot-Jones and Mrs. Treadwell, Claire, and Grace Shelly. Although the first two are minor characters, they carry their weight in terms of symbolic significance in this carefully engineered play. It is not the fact that Jack is insane that shocks Mrs. Piggot-Jones and Mrs. Treadwell but that his insanity consists of rejecting values they hold dear: they become offended by his comment that England is "a country of cosmic unimportance," and they are miffed that he won't speak at their church fete on their preferred topics of "hanging, immigration," or "the stranglehold of the Unions." They flee altogether when they realize that his ministry of love includes sexual love.

Mrs. Piggot-Jones and Mrs. Treadwell serve in the play as measures of upper class morality, which is uptight and repulsed by natural sexual expression. Their attitude toward sexual expression is conveyed by the wax fruit of Mrs. Treadwell's hat. Fruit traditionally symbolizes fertility, thus wax (fake) fruit symbolizes sterility. These are women who present a good front but do not "bear fruit."

Wax fruit first appears in the prologue, when the late Thirteenth Earl says that everything "tastes like wax fruit" after "the power of life and death" of being the hanging judge. The old Earl felt a sense of supreme power in his evening ritual of self-hanging; facing death made him feel fully alive. The Earl whets his appetite for dinner with his brush with death, in his zeal to avoid the wax fruit□or boring aspects of living. With the two church ladies, wax fruit is also equated with sexual frigidity or barrenness. Mrs. Piggot-Jones and Mrs. Treadwell mindlessly join with Jack in his song about toeing the line ("down on the heels, up on the toes") but cannot withstand his sermon of love that acknowledges their sexual natures. They have no sexual natures; they are wax fruit. When they return later in the play, they find a Lord more along their lines, who, like them, disapproves of girls who "show their bosoms and say rude things about the queen." They accept the Earl when he accepts their value of suppressing sexuality.

Claire's sexual nature is suborned to her greed. An "ice-cold biddy" according the voluptuous Grace, Claire openly acknowledges that her husband seeks sexual gratification elsewhere□with Grace, in fact. At the same time, Sir Charles sanctions his wife's affair with Dr. Herder, essentially prostituting her as a means to wrest the estate away from his nephew. Claire plays this role dutifully and with feigned passion. She drops the affair without regret when the game changes, and Dr. Herder no longer needs to be kept quiet. Her passion is finally aroused when Jack trades his litany of love and understanding for a litany of vengeance and cruelty. Whereas she had found her nephew repulsive during his Jesus, God-is-love phase, he proves irresistible to her during his Jack the Ripper, God the Avenger phase.

Jack the Ripper exudes power; he can make Claire "feel *alive,'* ' and he is the acknowledged master of the estate. She can afford to love a man one step up on their social ladder. Her life of pretensions has deadened her, and now she wantsJack to "wake" her, "with a kiss." Like the late Earl, however, she has an attraction to death. She tells Jack how a prowler outside her window made her shiver with excitement. But it is "impossible" for the ruling class "to feel," so she wants Jack to say he loves her "even if it isn't true." She blindly, and pathetically, plays a perverted duet with him, whispering "lover" in response to his filthy talk of "maggots," "gut-slime," and "gullet and rack." He calls her Mary, conflating her with Jack the Ripper's prostitute victims. Having scorned him in his loving phase, she becomes his first guilty victim in his avenging phase. Instead of feeling alive herself, Claire sacrifices her life so that Jack can shriek, "I'm alive, alive!" With dramatic irony, Sir Charles tells Jack that he has finally "behaved like a Gurney should"; that is, he has murdered a prostitute□Sir Charles's own wife□and blamed the crime on the butler.

Grace comes from the lower class but has "done it all, from Stanislavski to Strip ... greasy make-up towels, cracked mirrors, rhinestones and beads." According to Claire,

Grace made her living "on her back." However, although Grace freely indulges in sex, she is not sexually free: sex is her stock in trade. An actress-prostitute, she assists her lover Sir Charles by play-acting the role of the Lady of the Camelias, Jack's ideal lover. Dumas's Ca-mille was a martyr to love, but Grace's Camille, as she points out to Claire, carries a wax flower, one that cannot wilt. In Grace's case, the wax flower takes on a new meaning, now symbolizing the resilience and artificiality of plastic. Like the wax camellia, Grace is here for show, but she is also required to blossom and bear fruit.

Grace plays the role of a twentieth-century Mary Magdalene, the whore-mother-lover, to Jack's Jesus. Unexpectedly, Grace falls in love with Jack, because of the very qualities that obstruct Jack's ascension to the ruling class. Perhaps because she is not of the upper class, she is more vulnerable and open to the truth contained within his madness. She has not been contaminated with upper class perversions, although she desperately wants to be called "Lady Grace Gurney."

Ironically, just when Grace begins genuinely to love Jack, having started the relationship as an empty charade, she becomes his victim. Like Claire, Grace finds the power of the Avenger God irresistible and wants his attentions, complaining that he was more loving when he was "batty." Of course, his new status as a proper gentleman precludes an interest in healthy sex. Now Grace, like Claire, fulfils Jack the Ripper's appetite for vengeance against whores. It matters little when Jack says "She betrayed you," whether he refers to Grace's relations with his uncle or to her complicity in his "cure." Either way, she has prostituted herself, ruthlessly using her attractions to control him. When she voices genuine encouragement over his upcoming speech to the House of Lords, her words take on an ironic quality. "Don't worry, you'll kill 'em," she says, "and then you'll get around to me."

Once again, the threat of death is conflated with sex, since she means getting around to having sex with her, not killing her. Her murder is somewhat justified by her guilt, and Jack is deemed sane because "It's a sign of normalcy in our circle to slaughter anything that moves." She has become dispensable to the ruling class now that she has produced the wanted heir. The play becomes a tragedy with her death, since she and her love represented Jack's only hope for true redemption: salvation through love and the power to resist taking his place in the ruling class.

Source: Carole Hamilton, for *Drama for Students*, Gale, 1999.

Critical Essay #2

In this essay, Page provides an overview of Barnes's play, delineating the action of the play and the manner in which the narrative satirizes the British class system.

The Ruling Class is a large-cast, epic, state-of-England play, resembling others of the 1960's and early 1970's, such as *The Workhouse Donkey*, by John Arden, and *Brassneck*, by Howard Brenton and David Hare. It is in 27 scenes, with prologue and epilogue, and opens with the 13th Earl of Gurney delivering a speech praising England, parodying Shakespeare's *Richard II*: "this teeming womb of privilege, this feudal state... this ancient land of ritual", followed by the National Anthem. An abrupt switch follows the first of many: the Earl returns home to Tucker, his faithful old butler, and speaks, with the rich language typical of Barnes' work, of passing the death sentence (for he is a judge, too): "If you've once put on the black cap, everything else tastes like wax fruit". Then the Earl disconcertingly puts on a cocked hat and ballet skirt, climbs a step-ladder, puts his head in a silk noose, swings and accidentally kicks over the steps and hangs himself. The Earl's funeral is conducted by a "magnificently dressed" Bishop, who then disrobes on stage and changes into "a small, bald-headed, asthmatic old man". The will is read and Tucker is left £20,000. He breaks into the Edwardian music hall song: "I'm Gilbert the Filbert the Knut with a 'K'"; Barnes continues using songs for contrast and surprise.

The heir, the 14th Earl, appears, dressed as a Franciscan monk. He believes he is God, explaining this with the brilliant line: "When I pray to Him I find I'm talking to myself', adding "What a beautiful day I've made". Shocked, his family decides to have him marry, and□as soon as he has fathered an heir□he is declared insane. He is convinced he is already married to the Lady of the Camelias, so Grace, his uncle's mistress, is dressed as Marguerite Gautier and makes a stunning entrance singing *La traviata*. The Earl arrives for his wedding night on a unicycle. In the continuing series of theatrical coups, a psychiatrist brings together the Earl and a Scotsman who also believes he is God, and the shock to the Earl is expressed by an eight-foot beast "dressed incongruously in high Victorian fashion", wrestling with him.

In the second half of the play the Earl changes to a stern, authoritarian, judgemental man, thinking he lives in the Victorian era. The Master of Lunacy, brought in to certify him, will not, for they are both Old Etonians. The Earl comes to believe that he is Jack the Ripper□an impression reinforced by the setting of "a *dark huddle of filthy houses ... an impression of dark alleys"*. He murders his sister-in-law and lets Tucker be arrested for it, and Tucker reveals that secretly he is a Communist. The Earl, now seen as "normal" by his circle, goes to the House of Lords, represented very strikingly on stage, by *"tiers of mouldering dummies... covered with cobwebs".* Here he speaks as the Old Testament God, in favour of stern punishment, and finally he is seen stabbing the loving Grace.

Barnes wrote in a programme note, never reprinted:

In a playhouse ... we can use vivid colours, studied effects, slapstick, slang, songs, dances and blasphemies to conjure up men, monsters and ghosts. We can also raid mystery plays, puppet shows, Shakespeare (damn his eyes!) and demagogy to create a comic theatre of conflicting moods and opposites where everything is simultaneously tragic and ridiculous. This comedy is about the withdrawal of light from the world, the obstinacy of defeat, and asks again the question, is God a 10,000 foot tall, pink jelly bean?

The two acts of the play contrast the ideas of a loving God and a vengeful one and show that society is ruled by the latter concept. Along the way are satirical swipes at many aspects of British life: mockery of bishops, members of parliament, the House of Lords, the aristocracy, psychiatrists. Some of this is high-spirited, yet Barnes insists that this is a serious commentary on what was wrong with Britain: "I cared about the abuses and vices I was attacking. So much so that I was full of hate for them ... I was taking the ruling classes as a symbol of what I was really attacking, which was something deeper than just blood sports".

This long play has a Jacobean richness (Barnes later adapted several of Ben Jonson' s plays for stage and radio) in language, incident, and variety. It is also varied, surprising, and hugely theatrical. The Ruling Class anticipates aspects of the political debate of the 1980's: what were "Victorian values", and were they a good thing?

Source: Malcolm Page, *"The Ruling Class"* in *The International Dictionary of Theatre,* Volume 1: Plays, edited by Mark Hawkins-Dady, St. James Press, 1992, p. 694.

Critical Essay #3

In this essay, the critic provides an overview of the 1972 film version of The Ruling Class, *which Barnes adapted from his stage text. In addition to a detailed plot synopsis, the review finds the film to be thought-provoking and highly entertaining*.

A controversial comedy with plenty of tragedy mixed in, this was adapted by the playwright for the screen and would have been better with a crueler set of fingers at the typewriter to remove some of the indulgences. It's too lengthy but has many wonderful moments and mixes satire with farce and pain to create a movie with many faults, though it remains unforgettable. Andrews is a member of the House of Lords. He comes back to the family manse after having delivered a scathing speech to Parliament, and his alcoholic butler, Lowe, helps him prepare for what is apparently his nightly ritual. He dons long underwear, a tutu, a Napoleonic hat, puts a silken noose around his neck, and will swing a few times before landing on the ladder top that gives him safety and his life. This night, he inadvertently kicks the ladder over and dies of strangulation, thus leaving his membership in the House of Lords and his estate to his insane son, O'Toole. The sum of 30,000 pounds has been bequeathed to Lowe, but the rest of the family, Mervyn (Andrews' brother), Browne (Merwyn's wife), and Villiers (their dotty son) are shocked upon hearing the will read by Sim, their local bishop. Lowe chooses to stay in service, but now that he is rich, his attitude changes. He begins spouting communist slogans, drinking in public, and telling everyone in the family exactly what he thinks of them. O'Toole has been in a mental hospital for the last several years and he returns dressed as Jesus, a role he insists he is playing for real. He admits that when he prays to God, he finds that he's talking to himself. O'Toole spends many of his hours on a huge cross in the large living room and prates about distributing the family's wealth to the meek and downtrodden, something that frightens the others in the family who would never stand for that. There is only one way to rectify matters: have O'Toole sire a child, then toss him back in the looney bin and the family can assume control of the money by becoming the unborn child's guardians. Mervyn has been keeping a woman on the side, Seymour, and his plan is to get O'Toole and her wed as soon as possible. O'Toole, however, keeps telling everyone that he's already married to The Lady of the Camellias. Seymour arrives, dressed as Camille, sings a snatch from "La Traviata," and O'Toole is convinced that she is who she says she is. They get married and Seymour falls in love with O'Toole and admits that this is all Mervyn's plan. O'Toole sighs, understands, and, in his Jesus fashion, forgives them as they know not what they do. He totally accepts Seymour, they sing a duet of "My Blue Heaven," and he rides her into the bedroom on his tricycle. She's instantly pregnant. O'Toole's doctor, Bryant, wants to help and works on the crazed peer through the months of the pregnancy. Seymour is about to deliver their child when Bryant shows O'Toole the folly of his ways by introducing him to Green, another nut-case who thinks that he, too, is Jesus. O'Toole is shattered by meeting Green and must admit that he isn't Jesus at all; he's Jack. Everyone in the family is thrilled that he's come to his senses and ceases preaching the gospel of love and truth. What they don't know is that the "Jack" he refers to is, in fact, "Jack the Ripper," which they learn the hard way when O'Toole kills his aunt, Browne, then tosses the blame for it

on Lowe's drunken shoulders. O'Toole takes his seat in the House of Lords and makes a stinging speech that endorses bigotry and revenge and sets the sleeping peers on their feet, madly applauding the nonsense he's espoused. By this time, Mervyn, Bryant, and Sim have all gone bonkers themselves and so the castle is almost empty. O'Toole returns home and Seymour runs to put her arms around him. O'Toole responds by stabbing her. She screams her last and in the background, their child repeats, "I am Jack!" so there's no question that the genetic strain of madness has been passed through O'Toole's loins to his young son. There's hardly a segment of British society that comes out of this unscathed: the public school system, the Houses of Parliament, snobbism, the Church, Jesus, homosexuality, servants, the upper classes, and just about everything else it's fashionable to decry. It's caustic, funny, often goes too far and stays too long to make the points. O'Toole was oscar-nominated as the mad earl and bites off Barnes' speeches with Shavian diction. Lowe steals every scene he is in and the creators of the TV show "Benson" may have looked long and hard at Lowe's irrascible butler before they turned him into a black man. There is more than just a passing similarity in the two. Sim's role as the aged bishop is one of his best in a long career. A lot of money was spent on this movie, making it one of the best produced British films of the year. Barnes' play was produced in England in 1969, then had a short run in Washington, D. C., in 1971, but it has yet to find anyone in the Broadway area to mount it. Joseph E. Levine, who made his fortune making sandals-and-swords Italian films was the presenter here, a far cry from his Steve Reeves epics. Interiors were done at Twickenham with locations shot in Buckinghamshire, Lincolnshire, Surrey, Hampshire and London.

Source: Anonymous. Review of *The Ruling Class* in *The Motion Picture Guide*: N-R, 1927-1983, edited by Jay Robert Nash and Stanley Ralph Ross, Cinebooks (Chicago), 1986, p. 2684.

Adaptations

The film version of *The Ruling Class* was produced by Keep Films, starring Peter O'Toole, in 1971. Barnes wrote the screenplay for the film, but because he did not like deferring to O'Toole's editing decisions, the playwright never viewed the completed film.

Topics for Further Study

In what ways are Sir Charles and Claire representative of stereotypical upper class people? In what ways is Daniel Tucker representative of his class?

Peter Barnes has said that "Laughter's too feeble a weapon against the barbarities of life"; however, his humor strikes deliberately at human pretensions, particularly those of the upper class. How does Barnes use humor in this play to sway the audience?

Who is the hero of this play? How is the idea of heroism refashioned to Barnes's goals? Compare this play to a Jacobean play such as Ben Jonson's *Volpone*. What lessons has Barnes taken from his study of Jacobean comedy?

Compare and Contrast

1969: In England as in the United States, young people deepen the chasm between their generation and their parents' generation. In dress, hair styles, speech, music, and politics, young people express their opposition to the status quo.

Today: There is still considerable difference between generations, though current forms of protest are less rooted in cultural significance (such as the Vietnam War that galvanized 1960s youth) and more in generic, youthful rebellion.

1969: "Free love" and "love power" are mottoes of the hippie generation, who seek to cure the ills of society through acceptance and love. Sexual freedom, a natural outgrowth of their philosophy, is made viable through the introduction and wide availability of birth control.

Today: Sexual conduct has swung to a more conservative status due to a shift in the moral majority and a greater threat of socially transmitted disease than existed in the 1960s. The practice of birth control and abortion is being questioned and vigorously debated.

1969: Experimental theater is new and immensely popular. Audiences seek and expect to experience a "happening" at the theater, to be shocked and challenged as well as entertained.

Today: As with other aspects of society, theater too has returned to a more conservative mode. Experimental theater continues but much of it has been absorbed and diluted by the mainstream.

What Do I Read Next?

Barnes's play *Bewitched* (1974) sets his themes of greed, religious superficiality, and the corruption of the ruling elite in the context of seventeenth-century Spain, as King Carlos II tries to beget an heir. Once again, the self-indulgences of those in authority leads to chaos and futility.

The Ruling Class may have been influenced by some of the ideas in Jean Renoir's *The Rules of the Game,* a 1939 film that exposes the moral bankruptcy of the French upper class.

Volpone, Ben Jonson's satire about the lengths to which people will go to acquire an inheritance, is arguably the finest comedy of the Jacobean era. The play also illustrates Jonson's influence on Barnes. /p>

Two plays by George Bernard Shaw, whose influence on Barnes is considerable, explore class inequalities and upper class hypocrisy: *Major Barbara,about a Salvation Army officer disturbed by her father's morals, and the classic Pygmalion, a story of a street girl "passing" in high society after being trained how to act and speak like a lady.*

Further Study

Bock, Hedwig, and Albert Wetheim, editors. *Essays on Contemporary British Drama*, Verlag, 1981.

Essays on leading figures and issues in British theater today.

Dukore, Bernard F. *Barnestorm: The Plays of Peter Barnes*,Garland, 1995.

Provides a detailed analysis of each of Barnes's plays and adaptations along with generalizations about his style.

Dukore, Bernard F. *The Theatre of Peter Barnes*, Heinemann, 1969.

An earlier edition that discusses Barnes's work up to 1980.

Hobson, Harold. Introduction to *The Ruling Class*, Heinemann, 1981.

An edition of the play that discusses Barnes's influence on British theatre.

Innes, Christopher. *Modern British Drama 1890-1990*, Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Assesses Barnes as a major force in modern British comedy.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

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

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

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

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

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

Selection Criteria

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

How Each Entry Is Organized

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

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

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

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

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

Other Features

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

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

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

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

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

Citing Drama for Students

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We Welcome Your Suggestions

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

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