R.U.R. Study Guide

R.U.R. by Karel Čapek

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Introduction

When Karel Capek's *R.U.R.* (the acronymic title is short for "Rossum's Universal Robots") was first performed in 1921, it became a major international success and made Capek an internationally known playwright. Although *R.U.R.* may appear slightly dated nearly eighty years later, the concerns expressed by the playwright are still interesting to modern audiences, and the play is still performed in regional theatres. Capek's drama is also responsible for coining a new word, "robot," which became an important fixture of Hollywood films, especially the B-films of the 1950s. The word "robot" is derived from the Czech word *robota,* meaning forced labor, but it was the topic of the play, that technology can imperil the world, that made the play controversial.

The problems this play deals with are not the realities of everyday life; instead Capek is exploring the larger issues of the human condition. With technology booming immediately after the end of World War I, *R.U.R.* touched on the concerns of many people. The idea of a utopian society to replace the one fractured by the horror of the first World War was especially appealing to audiences, some of whom were deeply disturbed by Capek's vision of how technology might be misused. Capek's concerns about the dehumanization of man through technology provides the central core of this play, and it is this motif that warns of the destructive force of technology.

Although contemporary assessments of Capek's play frequently cite the stereotypical nature of the characters, there is enough depth to them to involve an audience, and this involvement is one of the play's strengths. At performances of *R.U.R.,* audiences and critics were both fascinated with the idea of non-humans that appeared human and terrified at the implications for human destruction at the hand of technology. These two reactions led to the play's success.

Author Biography

Karel Capek was born in January, 1890, in Male Svatonovice, a small village in northeastern Bohemia, an area that is now Czechoslovakia. Capek, the youngest of three children, was a sickly child, but by all accounts, he had a happy childhood, largely because of the influence of his older brother, Josef, who was also his best friend. Capek began writing poetry and fiction in high school, and after graduation, Capek began publishing stories, illustrated by Josef, in Czech newspapers. After studying in Prague, Berlin, and Paris, Capek earned a doctorate at Prague's Charles University in 1915. Even while at school, Capek and his brother continued to write, publishing their first book, a collection of tales, in 1916. Capek worked as a journalist and as a tutor, and he was intensely interested in the subject of Czech nationalism, often writing on that subject for his newspaper articles. His first play, *The Outlaw,* was produced in 1921. Capek fell in love with a young actress, who was an understudy in that play, but his poor health prevented them from marrying until 1935. *R.U.R.,* Capek's second play, was an enormous success, establishing Capek as an international playwright. During the next few years, Capek was very active, writing *From the Insect World* and *The Makropoulous Secret* in 1922. *Adam the Creator* was written with his brother, Josef, in 1927.

Although he was very successful as a playwright, Capek also turned his attention to novels. He published a succession of novels, including *The Absolute at Large* (1922), *Krakatit* (1924), *Hordubal* (1933), *Meteor* (1935), *An Ordinary Life* (1936), and *War with the Newts* (1937). Although he began his career as a successful playwright, it is as a science fiction writer that Capek is best known. His science fiction novels explore the possible misuse of technology, and while he did not oppose technology, Capek was concerned about man's ability to consider all of the implications of such advances. Capek briefly turned again to theatre in 1937, with *The White Plague* and *The Mother* (1938).

Capek was opposed to Nazism, and both he and his brother were warned to leave Prague as the threat of World War II became a reality. Both declined, and Capek died of pneumonia just three months before the Nazis invaded Prague. Hitler's troops did not know of Capek's death when they came to his house to arrest him. Josef was arrested and sent to a concentration camp where he later died. Karel Capek is considered one of Czechoslovakia's foremost writers. He not only championed freedom, but his contributions to literature are amongst the most important in Czech history.

Plot Summary

Act I

The play opens with Domin dictating letters to his typist, Sulla. The setting is a small island, although its precise location is not clear. A visitor is announced, and Helena Glory enters. She claims to have come to inspect the facility and leads Domin to believe that she is there as a representative of her father, the president. She is introduced to Sulla and cannot believe that she is a robot. After careful questioning of the young female robot, Helena insists that Sulla must be human. Domin offers to dissect Sulla, and Helena is aghast that Sulla would be so readily sacrificed. Hearing that she is present, Busman, Hallemeier, Gall, Fabry, and Alquist rush in. At first, Helena mistakes them for robots and tells them that she is there to save them from exploitation. She is embarrassed to learn that they are managers and doctors at the site. A discussion about the manufacturing of robots ensues, and the audience learns that robots are extremely cheap to manufacture, that they can do any type of work more cheaply than man, and thatR.U.R. envisions a world where robots will produce vast quantities of food and goods, thus replacing human workers. This society is meant to sound like another Eden, but it raises questions about slavery, especially when it is revealed that the robots occasionally suffer breakdowns, that they are soon to have pain receptors, and that their human creators see themselves as gods capable of replicating creation. The men all invite Helena to lunch with them and all but Domin exit to prepare the meal. He immediately professes his love and asks Helena to marry him. After a passionate kiss, she is assumed to have agreed.

Act II

It is ten years later and it is clear that Domin is very worried about the news from abroad. There have been no boats, mail, or telephone calls in several days. The last news was of revolts by the robots. All the men have brought gifts to Helena to celebrate the ten years that she has been on the island. Through conversations between Helena and her servant, Nana, the audience learns that both women are very afraid of the robots, that even the dog and other animals sense something unnatural. A robot, Radius, has rebelled. He was designed by Dr. Gall to have a better brain than most robots, and he is not satisfied to take orders any longer. After being examined by Dr. Gall it becomes clear that Radius has become human-like in many ways. Dr. Gall wants to have him destroyed, but Helena insists that he be spared. The audience learns from Dr. Gall that the plan for the future is to build robots who would be individually designed for each country, some black, some white, some Asian. Wanting to put an end to the robots' manufacture, Helena and Nana burn old Rossum's manufacturing notes. When the plant managers and doctors enter, it is revealed that they were saving Rossum' s notes as a trump card to control the robots. Before Helena can reveal that she burned them, a ship arrives in the harbor. Although, the men think it is the mail-boat, in reality it is the robots spreading word of a universal revolt. Before the human inhabitants can

seek escape on a waiting gun boat, the robots seize control of the boat and surround the house.

Act III

It is later the same day. Domin, Helena, Gall, Hallemeier, Fabry, Busman, Alquist, and Nana are prisoners, surrounded by the robots who will attack at any moment. The group discusses using old Rossum's formula to buy their escape, but then it is revealed that Helena burned it. Gall confesses that he has been building robots with souls for nearly three years, and Helena admits that she asked him to do so. He has built nearly 300 of the improved or changed robots, and it is presumed that these are the leaders of the rebellion. In making the robots like men, Gall has given them the ability to hate just as men hate. Busman sits down to balance his accounts, seemingly in denial at the crisis that looms just outside, as the rest of them discuss the morality of what they have created and discuss possible ways to escape. Finally, Busman runs outside to negotiate with the robot leader, Radius. Busman thinks that he can buy escape with a bribe of billions of dollars in profits. He dies when he touches the electrified fence. Domin takes Helena to another room as the house is attacked. As this act ends, Gall, Hallemeier, and Fabry are murdered, and Alquist is sentenced to a lifetime as a slave to the robots.

Epilogue

It is one year later. Alquist is hard at work trying to recreate the formula that will make more robots. He has had no success. There are no more humans alive on the earth, and robots, who have only a short life span, are dying off. Soon the earth will be devoid of life. Radius and a group of robots enter and threaten Alquist, but he still cannot create more robots. Radius is so desperate that he is willing to sacrifice himself to dissection if Alquist could learn something from it. After explaining that he is not a scientist and refusing to dissect the robots, Alquist collapses. Two robots enter, Primus and Helena. Their conversation reveals that each is capable of great emotion and desire. Animals are nolonger afraid of them and both have an appreciation for beauty that other robots lack. When Alquist awakens, he realizes that the two are different. Helena begins to cry when she thinks Primus is in danger and Primus attempts to defend Helena. Alquist sees in the two robots a possible future for the world, and calling them the new Adam and Eve, he dismisses them and tells them to go forth into the world. The play ends on this note of hope.

Act 1

Act 1 Summary

R.U.R. is Karel Capek's play about robots developed to replace humans in the work force for the objective of improving productivity and manufacturing efficiency. The play, written in 1921, addresses the issues of technology and its role in a burgeoning industrial global economy.

The play begins in the office of the factory of Rossum's Universal Robots (R.U.R.) where the factory manager, Mr. Domin, dictates letters to a secretary named Sulla. Domin dictates the full contents of each letter as Sulla listens intently. She begins to type once Domin has completely finished speaking. Each letter acknowledges the receipt of an order for robots or the resolution of some issue relating to robots.

This pattern of rapid-fire dictation continues through the completion of three letters. Then, a man named Marius enters the room to announce the arrival of a young woman named Helena Glory.

Domin greets Miss Glory and tells her that it is his honor to host her, as she is the daughter of President Glory. Domin excuses Sulla, who leaves the room. Then, Domin begins to talks to Miss Glory about a tour of the factory, assuming that this is the reason she has visited. Domin offers to show Miss Glory an extended view of the factory, given her position as the president's daughter.

Domin asks for Miss Glory's agreement to confidentiality, and she lifts the veil on her hat so that Domin may look into her eyes and see that she has no nefarious intentions. Domin is startled by her beauty and is distracted for a short time. He asks Miss Glory about the length of her stay.

Domin provides a history of the R.U.R. company, beginning with Mr. Rossum's unsuccessful attempt to re-create protoplasm while on a stay on the factory's isolated island. Rossum did discover an alternate substance, with which he created some deviant creatures in his attempts to make a human being.

Domin tells Miss Glory that Rossum was mad, thinking that he was a substitute for God in that he could create living creatures. Rossum's final version of a man lived only three days. Then Rossum's son, young Rossum, invented a human-looking robot that would revolutionize the industrial world. Robots are built without emotions or any unnecessary elements, so they make the perfect workers and the best solution for cutting manufacturing costs.

The Rossum robots are mechanically perfect, and yet they are not exactly like people. They have exceptional intelligence but no soul. Not satisfied with his accomplishments, young Rossum created a breed of Super-Robots twice the size of an average human,

but this was a disastrous experiment. The factory produces only normal sized robots today.

R.U.R. produces different grades of robots, ranging from those that work as street sweepers to more advanced levels. Domin calls for Sulla to return, and Miss Glory is shocked to discover that Sulla is one of the highest-grade robots. Miss Glory is further shocked when Marius reveals that he, too, is a robot.

Domin offers to have Sulla and Marius taken to the dissecting room to prove that they are not human inside, but Miss Glory is horrified at the suggestion. Sulla and Marius know that dissection means they would no longer be able to move, but they have no reaction to the idea of being dismantled.

Domin dismisses Sulla and Marius and indicates the rows of offices that are staffed with robots. Domin promises to show Miss Glory the Kneading Trough where the robot paste is developed as well as the vats where the kidneys, livers and brains are produced. Then, they would continue on to the Spinning Mill, where the nerves and veins are created.

Factory managers, Mr. Fabry, Dr. Gall, Dr. Hallemeier, Mr. Busman and Mr. Alquist, now join Domin and Miss Glory. The managers have just learned about Miss Glory's visit.

After an exchange of pleasantries, Miss Glory is sure that these men are also robots, and she reveals the real purpose of her visit, which is to intervene on behalf of robot rights as a representative of the Humanity League.

The men reveal that only factory officials are robots, and since they are managers, they are human beings. Miss Glory apologizes to the men, but she is firm in her intention to stop the exploitation of robots at the factory. The managers launch into explanations of the value of robots in the world, since they are extremely efficient and cost effective and will some day make human work obsolete.

The managers' answer does not comfort Miss Glory, who does not want to see humans put out of jobs, either. The managers assure her that the price of goods will shrink to nothing, and then humans will no longer require jobs or income.

Miss Glory is firm in her purpose as representative of the Humanity League and in her objective to liberate robots so that they may function as human beings. The managers try to explain to Miss Glory that providing wages and food to robots is an exercise in futility, since they have no need or want for anything. The only thing that robots experience that is remotely similar to a human emotion is something called Robot's Cramp, which is compared to an epileptic fit in a human being.

Miss Glory contends that this must be the robot's soul trying to make itself known, but the managers negate the suggestion. Dr. Gall admits that he is working on integrating pain-nerves into the robots, not to torture them, but because the robots do not know when they have a body part stuck in a machine or have done some other form of damage to themselves. The repair costs are escalating.

The ultimate goal for R.U.R. is to produce enough robots for the world so that human labor will become obsolete. Humans will be free to simply live and create. The managers are envious that Miss Glory is young enough that she will live to see that day.

The managers leave the room to prepare lunch, and while they are gone, Domin asks Miss Glory to marry him. Shocked by the proposal, Miss Glory declines, and Domin tells her that if she does not accept his proposal, all the other managers will ask her because they all have fallen in love with her.

Miss Glory tells Domin that he is mad, and he contends that a little madness is the best part of a man. Domin then grabs Miss Glory and kisses her passionately. She accepts the marriage proposal. The managers enter again, asking Domin if he has finished his job. When he indicates that he has, they all rush forward to congratulate the happy couple.

Act 1 Analysis

The setting of the play is the central factory located on a remote island, which is the perfect location for the drama and allure of robotic experiments without intervention of conventional organizations. The time period is assumed to be current with the play's introduction in 1921, so the subject matter would have been considered revolutionary and far-fetched to audiences at the time. Today's reader will probably find the play amusing in its content, given the advancements in technology eighty-five years later.

Following on the heels of the end of World War I, the play mirrors the rebuilding and industrialization occurring all over the globe. Capek's topic would have been relevant but frightening to average people, who sought comfort and peace, not more revolution and radicalism. Perhaps Capek sensed this and used the character of Miss Glory as the voice of reason and the champion of rights, robotic and human.

Capek's use of the character names Sulla and Marius is interesting to note, since these are the names of two prominent Roman Generals at the time of the fall of the Roman Empire. Both Sulla and Marius are well known for saving the citizens of Rome against invading armies. Marius is known in the study of ancient Roman history as a novus homo, or "new man." It is possible that Capek is equating the robots to the salvation of modern man at the fall of old manufacturing methods, soon to be replaced by technology, and he may give these names as a symbolic gesture to the next breed of "new man."

Act 2

Act 2 Summary

Ten years have passed, and the setting is now Helena's drawing room. Domin, Fabry and Hallemeier enter carrying potted plants for Helena. The men are on edge about the possibility of something happening today, but none will name the fear. Helena's voice is heard calling to Nana, the domestic, and Fabry and Hallemeier leave the room.

Helena and Nana enter the room, and Nana is disgruntled because Radius, one of the library robots, has gone berserk and destroyed statues and paintings. Nana is afraid of living around robots, and Helena advises her to feel sorry for the inanimate creatures. Helena finally sees Domin and asks about the flowers, and he tells her that they are to commemorate the tenth anniversary of Helena's arrival to the island.

Domin has other gifts for Helena from the other managers, and Helena reaches into Domin's pockets to find pearls and a cameo. Helena is startled when her hand touches a revolver, and Domin dismisses it by saying it is a mistake. Domin's gift to Helena is an approaching ship in the harbor, and Helena is once again startled to see that the ship is a gunboat.

Domin changes the subject each time Helena tries to understand what is going on and why there is a sudden need for guns. Domin and Helena reminisce about the day they met and Helena's initial intentions to stir a revolt among the robots. The mention of a revolt startles Domin, but he regains his composure, saying that any robot rebellion is a ridiculous idea.

Helena reminds Domin of the revolt that occurred in America when the workers began to shoot the robots, ending with the government turning robots into soldiers, which in turn caused so many wars to break out. Domin passes this off as the price to pay for progress, but Helena senses more trouble and asks Domin if they can leave the island because she is frightened.

Domin leaves after receiving a phone call from Fabry, and Helena summons Nana back to the room to light a fire. Helena begins to burn newspapers found in Domin's bedroom. Helena looks out the window to see that the approaching warship is named *Ultimus.* Nana returns with the papers, and Helena shares her fears that something dreadful is about to happen.

Nana shares the news of more wars from the newspaper headlines and states that Domin should stop producing the robots, which act as soldiers. Helena defends her husband by saying that he is merely filling orders, which is his job. Helena is stalled in her defense when Nana tells her that the robots have assassinated over seven hundred thousand citizens in wars in the Balkans, Madrid and other places all over the world.

Then, a shocking newspaper article reveals the establishment of a Robot organization that has issued a manifesto to all the robots in the world. Helena asks Nana to stop reading, but Nana is obliged to tell Helena about the story that not one birth has occurred in the world during the past week. Nana declares that this is the end of the world because the population is not being replenished, and Nana leaves the room in a state of despair.

Helena calls Mr. Alquist to come in, and she asks the meaning of the word "Ultimus." Alquist replies that it means "the last." Helena tells him that that is the name of her new ship, and she wonders if they will be going on a trip soon. Mr. Alquist indicates that he hopes this is the case because things are just moving on.

Helena tells Alquist that she knows something awful has happened but that Domin will not tell her anything. Alquist responds that he has not heard of anything happening yet, but he admits that he is a little apprehensive of all the change and the new ways of doing things.

Alquist wonders if Nana has a prayer book with a prayer to halt progress, but Helena has never heard of such a thing. Alquist recites a prayer of his own, thanking the Lord for the opportunity to work but also praying that Domin becomes enlightened and destroys the robots. In the interim, he prays for protection from the robots.

Alquist shares with Helena that he sees the destruction of mankind coming, but then he hurries from the room before saying anything else. Helena calls for Nana again and asks her to bring Radius to her in the drawing room. Helena then places a call to Dr. Gall to ask him to join them in the drawing room as well.

Helena sympathizes with Radius for catching the robot disease of revolt and for his imminent destruction in the Stamping Mill. Helena knows that Radius is more intelligent than the others are because Dr. Gall has given him a better brain and that the experience in the Stamping Mill will be very painful. Dr. Gall listens to Radius' heart during this conversation and reports that Radius is clearly upset, as evidenced by a rapid heartbeat. Dr. Gall confesses that the newer models of robots are more advanced, with better brains and more sensitivity that Rossum's original models were.

Helena wants to know why no more children are being born in the world, and Dr. Gall tells her that the over-production of robots has made man all but obsolete. There is no need for reproduction. In spite of this fact, governments and businesses all over the world continue to order robots.

Dr. Gall tells Helena that no one has had the courage to stop robot production because he would probably be killed. The integration of robots into business has significantly increased production and reduced costs, which is the universal mantra of business. Dr. Gall leaves the room, and Helena calls once more for Nana to light a fire in the drawing room.

Helena exits to Domin's room and returns with a stack of papers, which she begins feeding into the fire. Helena finishes her task just as Domin and the other managers

return to congratulate Helena on the ten-year anniversary of her visit to the island. Helena leaves the room to get drinks, and the men discuss whether they should inform Helena of the recent events and their relief that "it's all over now."

Helena returns to the room, and Domin tells her that the international robot organization has staged a revolution and seized all firearms, telegraphs, radio stations, railways and ships. This explains why Domin and the others have received no mail or newspapers in the last week. The news of the robot revolution has arrived with the *Ultimus* this morning. Helena thinks the revolution must be the reason that Domin sent for a war ship, but he claims to have ordered a ship six months ago in honor of Helena's upcoming anniversary.

Domin and the other managers are encouraged now because they have spotted the regular mail boat approaching and assume that the revolt has ended. Domin believes that the cables have not been restored and that the robots still retain control of radio stations, but he is encouraged as long as the timetable for the regular mail boat remains.

Domin reassures Helena that she is not in danger because, if necessary, she will be on board the *Ultimus* and safe from any uprising. Domin has power over the robots because he has the plans and secrets of robot manufacturing. Hallemeier interrupts the conversation to announce that the mail boat, the *Amelia*, has arrived, the same ship that bore Helena to the island originally.

Helena is seized with panic and urges Domin and the others to leave immediately, but they decline because they have plans to manufacture a new breed of robot as soon as this current revolt is squelched. National Robots produced in countries all over the world will replace Universal Robots. The new breed of robots will include robots of different colors, nationalities and languages to inhibit communication. The managers will then incite the new robots to view the others with scorn because of their differences, which will, in turn, create animosity among the robots. Helena is sickened by the thought of Domin's plan to develop a National Robot company and begs him to close the factory, but Domin will not be deterred. Such an achievement would be enormous, should be he successful.

Fabry, who has been down at the dock to meet the mail ship, returns and gives Domin a flyer announcing a universal robot revolt. The mail ship carries no mail, only thousands of flyers inciting riot. Domin and the managers quickly decide to make their way to the *Ultimus,* but they are unable to leave because the robots have surrounded the house. The factory whistle blows, indicating the advent of the robot revolt.

Act 2 Analysis

The author introduces several important themes in this act, one of them being greed. The managers of the robot factory have isolated themselves on an island so that they are not forced to deal with any of the social implications of their product. Even though

they continue to hear news of the robots destroying people individually and through war, the managers continue to supply orders in spite of the increasing threats to humanity. Their goal is to make money.

The author also introduces the theme of prejudice with the plans to build robots of differing colors and nationalities. The managers will incite the robots to hate any other robot that is different from itself, thus creating prejudice and hatred. This is clearly a human trait, and it is a flaw in the characters of Domin and the others that they would choose to introduce prejudice and hatred into characters that are not capable of exhibiting those qualities on their own.

R.U.R. functions as a parable about how capitalism treats the working class, symbolized by robots. The plans to manufacture National Robots imply that society uses racism and nationalism as political tools to control the populace, who would otherwise revolt against oppressors.

The robots can also represent emerging technology and the role of science in society. As the robots reach an overwhelming strength through universal organization, it is possible that mankind, symbolized by Domin and the managers, will have destroyed itself through the symbol for technology, the robots.

Act 3

Act 3 Summary

Later the same day, Domin, Dr. Gall and Alquist are in Helena's drawing room looking out the windows through closed shutters. The robots have surrounded the building and stand shoulder-to-shoulder, like a wall, just waiting in silence. Dr. Gall notes that the robots are not armed, but Domin counters that the little group in the building is simply outnumbered.

Regardless of weapons, the men know that the robots have the upper hand and that the end of mankind is at hand. Fabry and Hallemeier enter the room carrying electric cables and tell the group that they have barricaded the doors. They are ready to lay the electric cable along the outside railing so that the robots will burn up if they touch it.

Busman enters the room carrying the company ledgers so that he can balance the books before the managers are killed. Domin notices out the window that the robots are unloading guns from the *Amelia* and that the *Ultimus* has its guns trained on the room where the managers sit.

Domin and the others know that their deaths are certain now because the robots are superior marksmen. Alquist states that it was a crime to make robots, but Domin does not regret the enterprise even as he faces his own death today. To Domin's thinking, there was no crime in building robots that could alleviate the labor of man, who was already too heavily burdened. Domin states that his motivation was never making money but rather achieving a utopia for man, who would not be burdened with menial work and cares and could elevate his higher nature.

The sound of Helena playing the piano wafts in from the other room, and Hallemeier comments on the beauty of it and suggests that the men might be better off had they concentrated more on beauty and the arts instead of technology and industry. In dedicating their lives to these inanimate pursuits, the men have deprived themselves of the true riches of the world.

Hallemeier can see that the robots are reaching for the gate and orders Fabry to turn on the current, resulting in the destruction of five robots. Domin comments that the whole situation seems like a dream he has had before, and he can project how each of the managers will be killed.

Hallemeier states that the robots are to blame for all this chaos, but Alquist challenges him by saying that the factory managers caused the destruction of mankind for the sake of money and progress. Dr. Gall chimes in to say that he is to blame because a few years ago he began to add irritability to the character of the robots, which is ultimately the reason for the dissatisfaction they exhibit today.

Dr. Gall knows that the robots feel superior to humans and hate humans because of it. The others continue to badger Dr. Gall about his reasons for changing the robots, when Helena enters and admits that she asked Dr. Gall to make the modifications years ago. Helena explains that she wanted the changes made to the robots because she thought that if they were a little more human, they might gain some understanding and not hate humans so much.

The group begins to panic as they realize that the robots are imbued with more emotional strength than originally thought. Suddenly, Busman announces a plan to negotiate with the robots. Busman will give Rossum's original manuscripts to the robots in exchange for the safe exit of the managers and Helena on the *Ultimus.*

The managers agree that Busman's plan has some merit, but Domin cannot find the manuscripts in his safe. Helena admits that she burned the documents and begs the forgiveness of the men for being so shortsighted in that decision. She burned the papers because she wanted an end to the madness and wanted all the remaining humans on the island to leave and start new lives elsewhere.

Busman thinks of another plan, giving the robots the half billion dollars in the factory safe in exchange for the safe passage of the humans. The others in the group watch through the window as Busman runs toward the wall of robots with stacks of money in his hands. As Busman gestures to the robots, he accidentally touches the wall and is killed instantly by the electrical charge.

The managers know that Busman's death is the beginning of the siege, and they go to different rooms as the robots, led by Radius, enter the drawing room. The robots kill Helena and the managers, with the exception of Alquist, who they need for work. Radius announces that mankind has fallen, and a new world ruled by the robots has arisen. The sound of thousands of marching robots is heard as the act closes.

Act 3 Analysis

The author uses the literary technique of foreshadowing when Busman enters the drawing room with his arms filled with ledgers so that he cannot see the electric cables that Hallemeier and Fabry have brought in. The men yell at Busman to watch out for the cables, and he sidesteps them. However, near the end of the act, Busman is killed by the electric cables that line the fence where he stands attempting to negotiate with the robots. Symbolically, mankind's own technology is the means of death.

Domin's monologue about the whole scenario with the robots having played out before also foreshadows events to come. "Perhaps we've been killed these hundred years and are only ghosts. It's as if I had been through all this before; as if I'd already had a mortal wound here in the throat. And you, Fabry, had once been shot in the head. And you, Gall, torn limb from limb. And Hallemeier knifed." Domin senses that he has lived through this revolution before, and eerily, the manners in which he notes the deaths of the managers is how each one is killed in the end by the robots. This underlines the

sense of fatality in the play. Mankind seems by nature fated to create the means of his own destruction.

Domin, who is the protagonist in the story, has the most poignant message in his monologue about his true objectives for building the robots. "To hell with your dividends. Do you suppose I'd have done an hour's work for them? It was for myself that I worked, for my own satisfaction. I wanted man to become the master, so that he shouldn't live merely for a crust of bread. I wanted not a single soul to be broken by other people's machinery. I wanted nothing, nothing, nothing to be left of this appalling social structure. I'm revolted by poverty. I wanted a new generation. I wanted - I thought - "

Domin's goal is a utopian society where perfection is achieved through equal and appropriate benefits and laws shared by everyone. A utopia is an ideal world, but there is no agreement on how to establish a utopian society. The human forces of greed and lust for power need to be contended with, and many utopian ideals cannot stand up to them. The downfall of Domin's utopia seems to be twofold. First, he does not consider robots to be human. He enslaves them and stunts them. The utopia is not for robots. If robots are symbolic of the working class, then this is only a utopia of the upper class. Second, Domin's utopia leaves the humans useless and without drive. Because humans have no work to do, they aren't even driven to procreate. When humans are useless, they become extinct.

Epilogue

Epilogue Summary

A year has passed since the robot uprising, and Alquist sits alone in a laboratory flipping through pages of books in great despair. The robots have demanded that Alquist produce the formula to make more robots, and Alquist is at a loss because Dr. Gall had done that part of the work. With all the other managers dead, the burden rests on Alquist, and he is desperate for a solution.

Radius and some other robots enter the lab to tell Alquist that they need more robots to replace themselves, since a robot will probably last for only twenty years. Radius demands the formula to create robots and does not understand Alquist's inability to produce it. Radius order Alquist to experiment with solutions in test tubes, but Alquist says that exercise would be futile. Alquist tells Radius to keep searching for humans in an attempt to repopulate the earth, but Radius' expeditions have returned with the news that no human life exists on the planet. Alquist is the last specimen.

Radius suggests that Alquist dissect live robots in order to determine their construction, but Alquist again tells the robot that he is not trained in this aspect of work. Undeterred, Radius volunteers to be dissected for the good of the whole, but Alquist is not able to perform the operation and collapses in exhaustion.

Two robots named Helena and Primus enter the lab and begin to examine all the equipment, commenting that Alquist does experiments with the items they see. Helena goes to the window and comments on the beauty of the sunrise as Primus reads Alquist's anatomy book, commenting that the information is the secret of life.

Primus agrees that the sunrise is beautiful, and Helena comments that she is filled with strange feelings today, as if she were a bird and could fly. Helena also tells Primus about a secret place she has found with a cottage and two lovable puppies. Primus tells Helena that she is beautiful, and the pair looks into a mirror for the first time. Helena can see the differentiations in their appearances.

Alquist awakens to the sound of laughter coming from Helena and Primus and realizes that these must be the last two of Dr. Gall's special robots. Alquist wants to dissect one of them to determine their makeup, but the other one will not allow it. Alquist understands that the robots are capable of love, and calling them Adam and Eve, he bids them to go out into the world. Helena and Primus embrace and leave arm in arm.

Epilogue Analysis

The author ends the play with a hopeful tone. Helena and Primus are capable of feeling and expressing emotions, which will lead to love and the repopulation of the earth. Although not essentially human, these two are closer to human beings than any of the

other robots, due to Dr. Gall's foresight of adding emotional capabilities to a few specimens. In an obvious symbolic allusion, Alquist calls Helena and Primus Adam and Eve, since they now represent the beginning of the world once more, just as the Biblical Adam and Eve did when the earth was new.

Characters

Mr. Alquist

Alquist is an architect and the Head of the Works Department at R.U.R. He is older and a traditionalist. He reveals in Act II that he prays that the manufacture of robots will cease and that the world will return to the way it once was. Alquist sees the manufacture of robots as a profitable venture that is evil at its core. He escapes death because Radius pronounces a sentence that Alquist should finish out his life as a laborer, a slave for the robots. In the Epilogue, Alquist tries unsuccessfully to recreate the formula to create more robots. At the play's conclusion, he finds that there are two robots who have become humans and Alquist sends them out to repopulate the earth.

Consul Busman

As the General Business Manager at R.U.R., Busman is concerned with the bottom line. When Miss Glory asks about giving the robots a soul, Busman replies with estimates of increased cost. He anticipates that eventually robots will replace all workers and that the cost of manufacturing goods will decrease steadily. When the robots attack, Busman continues working on his accounts, almost in denial. Busman decides that he can buy the humans' freedom, but when he goes to speak to the robots, he touches the fence and is electrocuted.

Harry Domin

Domin is the General Manager at R.U.R. Domin is an idealist who envisions that robots will help create a paradise on earth for man, who will have robots to do the work and free man to simply enjoy life. He envisions men as the new gods with a world to rule and robots as the servant class. At their first meeting, Domin claims to have instantly fallen in love with Helena Glory and asks her to marry him. In the end, Domin is murdered by the robots.

Mr. Fabry

Fabry is the Engineer General, Technical Controller of R.U.R. Like almost everyone else, Fabry is murdered during the robot rebellion.

First Robot

This robot is one of the group in the Epilogue who demands that Alquist create more robots.

Dr. Gall

Dr. Gall is head of the Physiological and Experimental Department at R.U.R. When the play opens, he is working on giving the robots pain receptors so that they will be more careful and less likely to damage themselves. When the robots revolt, Dr. Gall reveals that he changed the robots, made them more human he actually made them better than human. During the revolt, Gall, too, is murdered by the robots.

Helena Glory

Helena is the daughter of the President. She initially meets Harry when she comes to inspect the R.U.R. factory. On her first visit to the factory, Helena is aghast to discover that the robots, which appear so human to her, are treated as mindless drones. Even ten years after her marriage to Domin, Helena cannot be at ease amongst the robots. She pleads with Gall to make them more human, to give then each a soul. In the rebellion that follows, she is murdered by the robots.

Dr. Hallemeier

Dr. Hallemeier is head of the Institute for Psychological Training of Robots. Hallemeier tells Miss Glory that the robots are not capable of love. According to him, they have no soul or passion or will of their own. He tells Miss Glory that occasionally the robots suffer from something called "robot' s cramp," a breakdown in their mechanism that resembles rebellion. In the revolt, Hallemeier is murdered by the robots.

Helena

Helena is a robot. Dr. Gall created her in Helena Glory's image, but she is only a poor copy of the original. In the Epilogue, Helena the robot is revealed to be human-like. She is one of the last robots created by Gall, and she is capable of love and emotions. Alquist sees her as the next Eve.

Marius

Marius is a robot. He works at the plant office for Domin.

Nana

Nana is Miss Glory's servant. She has come to the island to take care of Helena, who wants a human being to be close to her and not a robot. She helps Helena burn the formulas and is murdered with everyone else.

Primus

Primus is a robot, created on the same day as the robot Helena. When Alquist threatens to dissect Helena, Primus comes to her defense. Alquist realizes that Primus is human and thinks that he has discovered the next Adam, who with his Eve will repopulate the earth.

Radius

Radius is a robot in charge of the library. In Act II, he appears to be the latest victim of "robot cramp." Radius has a better brain than most other robots and he does not want to take orders. He tells Helena Glory that he wants to be a master and give orders. After an examination by Dr. Gall, it is revealed that Radius's attack is not the typical "robot cramp." Instead, it appears that he has become more human. When all the robots rebel, it is Radius who leads them. In the Epilogue, Radius realizes his folly in murdering his creators. He demands that Alquist create a formula to make more robots, and is willing to sacrifice himself to aid in the research.

Second Robot

This robot is one of the group in the Epilogue who demands that Alquist create more robots.

Servant

In the Epilogue, the servant waits upon Alquist, who has been trying to recreate the formula.

Sulla

Sulla is a robot; she functions primarily as Domin's secretary or typist. She appears like any other young woman, and is so convincing that Helena Glory cannot, at first, accept that Sulla is not human.

Third Robot

This robot is one of the group in the Epilogue who demands that Alquist create more robots.

Themes

Anger and Hatred

When the robots rebel and attack, it is revealed that at Helena's suggestion, Dr. Gall has given the robots a soul and has given them the ability to appreciate their condition. But in making them more human-like, Gall has also given them the ability to hate, just as humans are capable of hating. Since the robots are treated like insignificant and expendable creations, they soon learn to hate their creators and all humans. They are without a conscience and can hate and kill at will.

Class Conflict

With the creation of robots, the earth is divided into two classes: those who have control and those who are controlled. The robots form this latter class, which is designed to be exploited. The robots are little more than slaves who are expected to work until they can work no longer, a period of about twenty years. They are designed and treated as though they have no feelings, no needs, and no expectations. The robots' builders envision the humans as a kind of aristocracy, superior to the robots they control. As is the case in all feudal societies, eventually the peasants or slaves revolt and murder their masters.

Duty and Responsibility

As the creators of a new life form, the robot creators have a responsibility for how their creations are used, but in this case, the builders see the robots only in terms of exploitation and greed. The builders will sell their robots to whomever orders them and has the cash to pay. They ignore the moral implications of what they have done, preferring to isolate themselves on the island. When the robots rebel, rather than stop selling the robots and explore possible solutions, the manufacturers continue to sell robots. When it becomes clear that humanity is in real danger, their only thought is for their own escape.

Human Condition

This play explores the human condition and envisions a scenario where man destroys himself through greed. Technology, which offers the opportunities to solve many of the world's problems, is used to create a slave race, who will perform all the labor while another group becomes richer. In response, humans become expendable and cease to reproduce. Evolutionary theory argues that survival is a function of the species best able to adapt. In the New World order, it is the humans who serve no purpose. This bleak vision of humanity is off-set at the play's ending when two of the robots offer the opportunity to create a new human race.

Individual vs. Machine

In this play, the conflict focuses on who will survive, the humans or the robots. In a real sense, when the manufacturers give the robots souls and the ability to feel, they create individuals where machines previously stood. This leads to thinking as individuals, including the desire to have control. In a sense, this play proves that the individual is superior to the machine, since as machines, the robots could be controlled. But given the ability to think, they become individuals and superior beings.

Prejudice

One of the plans to control the robots involves creating robots to fit national or local standards instead of universal models. When discussing how this plan will work, the manufacturers reveal their own prejudices, since they see that certain "races" of robots will be built to hate other "races" of robots. The ensuing conflict will prevent the robots from uniting against humans. It is a plan to build in racial prejudice in a creation that would naturally not have that ability.

Revenge

The robots are a downtrodden group, who when they finally understand that they are slaves, seek revenge against their builders. They envision themselves as superior to humans and become so caught up in their revenge that they forget that humans hold the key to their existence. It is a symbiotic relationship, one that is forgotten by the robots. Revenge becomes more important than survival.

Science and Technology

Capek's play focuses on the dangers of technology. While new discoveries offer the best hope for curing disease and easing human existence, it also presents risks if not used correctly. The greed of those who use technology without regard for the consequences is at the center of this play. At the play's conclusion, two robots have become human and offer hope for the continuation of mankind on earth. But Primus and Helena also illustrate that it is not technology that offers the answers (Alquist cannot make new robots or modify the old), but it is human survival that matters if man is to succeed.

Style

Audience

Authors usually write with an audience in mind. Capek intended *R.U.R.* as a way to awaken audiences to the possible threat of technology. His concern about the fate of humanity is transmitted to the audience as they watch and listen to the drama unfold.

Character

The actions of each character are what constitute the story. Character can also include the idea of a particular individual's morality. Characters can range from simple stereotypical figures to more complex multi-faceted ones. Characters may also be defined by personality traits, such as the rogue or the damsel in distress. "Characterization" is the process of creating a life-like person from an author's imagination. To accomplish this the author provides the character with personality traits that help define who he will be and how he will behave in a given situation. Domin is an idealist. The audience learns this through speeches that he makes, especially his visions of an utopian society.

Drama

A drama is often defined as any work designed to be presented on the stage. It consists of a story, of actors portraying characters, and of action. But historically, drama can also consist of tragedy, comedy, religious pageant, and spectacle. In modern usage, drama explores serious topics and themes but does not achieve the same level as tragedy.

Genre

Genres are a way of categorizing literature. Genre is a French term that means "kind" or "type." Genre can refer to both the category of literature such as tragedy, comedy, epic, poetry, or pastoral. It can also include modern forms of literature such as drama novels, or short stories. This term can also refer to types of literature such as mystery, science fiction, comedy or romance. *R.U.R.* is science fiction.

Plot

Generally plots should have a beginning, a middle, and a conclusion, but they may also sometimes be a series of episodes connected together. Basically, the plot provides the author with the means to explore primary themes. Students are often confused between the two terms; but themes explore ideas, and plots simply relate what happens in a very obvious manner. Thus the plot of *R. U.R.* is the story of the creation of robots and the

robot revolt that destroys almost all of mankind. But the theme is that of greed and technology out of control.

Setting

The time, place, and culture in which the action of the play takes place is called the setting. The elements of setting may include geographic location, physical or mental environments, prevailing cultural attitudes, or the historical time in which the action takes place. The locations for *R. U.R.* are on an island. They include the offices of the plant, Domin and Helena's home, and the plant laboratory. The action occurs over a period of eleven years.

Historical Context

The end of World War I brought many changes to Europe, Russia, and the United States. The years of war had been hard on many countries. Because of severe famine, Russia had signed a peace treaty and withdrawn from the war earlier than other countries. The Russian Revolution and the assassinations of the Romanovs did little to improve life for its citizens. Life was not much better in post-war Europe or America. The Spanish flu of 1918 left more than twenty million dead, and the war had been responsible for another eight and a half million deaths. The war had inflicted more than one hundred billion dollars worth of damage, and many countries were in serious debt. A year after the war ended a scientist finally succeeded in splitting an atom, opening the way for greater, more dangerous discoveries. Technology was allowing faster automobiles, new highways, and faster transportation. The first non-stop flight from North America to Ireland was completed in June 1919, and airplanes, which had proved very efficient during the war, were promising to provide a way to make the world smaller. Thus, when Capek began writing *R.U.R.,* the world seemed a dangerous and destructive place.

If technology was offering the promise of a better life, it was also promising a new level of destructiveness. The war effort had led to larger bombs and the development of gas weapons. The Germans had developed a weapon so efficient that it could be used against a city from a distance of more than seventy-five miles. They used "Big Bertha" on Paris, and within three months, the bombardment had killed more than a thousand people. The weapon was inaccurate, but Paris was a large city and hard to miss. This new weapon showed that technology could be used to kill and from a distance, thus depersonalizing the process. War casualties, as a result of all this new technology, demonstrated just how fragile the human body really was. The sheer number of deaths and the severity of wounds shocked citizens, soldiers, and governments on both sides. In addition, soldiers fell victim to disease. The flu epidemic was so severe it was compared to the fourteenth-century plagues that killed one third of Europe's population. More importantly, the flu epidemic illustrated that while technology had made advances in killing people more efficiently, it had still not found a way to save their lives. It was a sobering lesson for human beings to learn.

If the war had horrified men, the need to find a way to prevent another war motivated leaders to seek other solutions. After five months of work, a treaty was forced upon the Germans that resulted in severe penalties and terrible financial hardship. Boundaries were redrawn and new countries created. The League of Nations was formed to settle disputes, but famine, poverty, and a decaying economic picture led to a shaky peace. This atmosphere forms the backdrop of *R. U.R.* Wars continue to be fought, but now robots sustain the casualties, which makes it even easier to continue the fighting. Leaders continue to look to better technologies to use against their enemies, and robots provide that technology. But just as the flu epidemic proved that technology and science had limits, *R.U.R.* proves that technology can create new and greater problems even as it makes life easier. Domin's desire to see robot labor eliminate famine with a plentiful harvest reflects the hunger that gripped much of the world in the years following the war.

R.U.R. looks to the future and finds that answers may not be found easily in a laboratory.

Critical Overview

Although printed reviews of *R. U.R.* are not readily available, there are a number of indications that the play was well received and that it enjoyed international success when it opened in the Czech National Theatre in 1921. It was equally successful when produced in Europe, Asia, and North America, opening on Broadway in 1922. At its premiere, audiences were both fascinated at the promises offered by technology and horrified at its potential for destruction. The play's success stemmed from the public's current interest in technology. Technological advances promised an easier life, one filled with more leisure time. The image on stage, of robots engaged in menial, mindless work, was appealing. Capek's lead character, Domin, suggests a utopian dream is possible. He envisions a world without hunger and with enough free labor to provide for all man's needs. Domin tells the audience of a future filled with freedom and a cornucopia of plenty, and then, the play's last three acts shatter that hope. For the audience, this turn of events is a graphic reminder that while technology may make man's life easier, it presents incredible risks far beyond what man can imagine or foresee. The play leaves the audience feeling conflicted between optimistic hopes for the future and pessimistic fears for that same future's troublesome potential.

With the play's success, Capek also found himself acclaimed an international success. This added to the reputation of the newly created Czech Republic. Although the play helped to establish Capek's reputation, he was disappointed that audiences and critics focused on the robots and not the social commentary their actions were intended to suggest. When Helena sees a robot for the first time, she cannot accept that it is real. The audience reacts just as strongly to the idea that robots might appear alive, function as humans, but need no subsistence or money to live. That they feel no pain and can express no opinions or desires also made them unique from mankind. But then the audience receives an abrupt reminder that slave labor has its price, and the horror of war is revisited in the theatre. The audience is also reminded that humanity comes with a price after all, it is the robots infusion with human-like traits that leads to the annihilation of mankind. Capek was so disappointed in the critics and audience's focus on robots instead of his social ideology that he later refused to see the play in performance. That *R.U.R.* is best remembered as the source of the word "robot" would only demonstrate to Capek that his play was a failure with regard to achieving the effect he had intended.

R.U.R. is considered the most successful of Capek's dramas. Its themes, the fate of man and the loss of man's humanity to technology, became a staple of his other works. The move from drama to fiction was a successful one for him, and Capek is best known for his science fiction novels. He did not oppose technology, but he was concerned that men had not given enough consideration to its potential misuse. For example, scientists succeeded in splitting the atom in 1919, and Capek, understanding the negative and dangerous potential of atomic energy, uses that destructive potential in *The Absolute at Large* (1922) and *Krakatit* (1924). He was not a realist focusing on man's ordinary dilemmas; instead Capek found expression in archetypal characters thrust into extraordinary situations. Capek's novels and dramas are important as a contribution to

Czech's literary reputation, but more importantly, they are important as an expression of Capek's concern for the survival of humanity. His work had relatively little influence on the future development of Czech theatre, since Capek's greatest focus was on fiction and not drama. In fact, his brother Josef's theatre designs had a more lasting influence, but *R.U.R.* continues to be performed in regional theatres where it persists in provoking discussions about technology, humanity, and greed.

Criticism

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

Critical Essay #1

Metzger is a Ph.D., specializing in literature and drama at the University of New Mexico. In this essay, she discusses the theme of creation and the responsibility of the creator in R.U.R.

In *R.U.R.,* Karel Capek comes very close to echoing the ideas first explored by Mary Shelley a hundred years earlier in *Frankenstein* (1818). Like Shelley, Capek is also asking man to consider the ramifications of science. It is not simply whether man can achieve something through technology, but whether he *should* that interested Shelley. It is the question with which Capek struggled as well. The creature that Victor Frankenstein builds is meant to prove that its creator can supplant God, that God has become redundant. The creature is bigger than man, and illustrates Frankenstein's belief that he can create a man who is superior to that which God has created. Old Rossum has a similar goal. His robots are tireless workers, demanding little, but with the capacity to be stronger and faster, more efficient than the model created by God. But as both authors prove, creation is not without responsibility.

Even before Dr. Gall humanizes the robots, there were problems that signaled the failure of Rossum's creation. The robots appeared to be prone to suffering some sort of breakdown, which the plant has labeled "robot cramp." There is no acknowledged awareness that this may prove serious, and in fact, the breakdowns are dismissed as insignificant. Rossum has created something that appears human, feels human, and sounds human, but he stops short of creating humanity. However, on the surface, his creations seem to prove that man can conquer science. Rossum apparently never considers the potential for misuse, nor does he foresee that in the future man might modify his creation and create a new kind of robot. Greed motivates mass-production of the robots and their sale to any outlet with enough money. The goal of creating a labor saving substitute for man leads to the creation of quasi-men with orders to kill. And still, those who manufacture this new weapon accept no responsibility for its use. But the real creator of the robots is Dr. Gall who, through love, is motivated to create robots with souls. It never occurs to either Dr. Gall or Helena that they are creating life and that when life is created, someone has to assume responsibility for assimilating that life into society. It is the point that Old Rossum missed as well.

In a similar fashion, Victor Frankenstein misses that point when he creates his creature. He envisions himself as a replacement for God, as with his creation of a life, that God has been rendered unnecessary. As the robot's creators will learn a hundred years later, a new creation needs someone to acculturate this new life into the world. Frankenstein's creature is abandoned to find his own way, and left alone, he finds that murder is the only way to force his creator into assuming a responsible role. Of course even murder does not shock Victor, who escapes into fainting spells, illness, and sleep, rather than face what he has created. Of course, none of the plant managers at Rossum's Universal Robots feign illness when the first reports begin to surface of the robots' murderous spree; instead they continue to mass-produce their robots and accept orders and collect money. Still, they recognize the danger as they plot their escape on a waiting gun ship.

Even as the robots besiege their last refuge, Busman escapes into his accounts, and the managers and scientists escape into a celebration of Helena's ten years on the island. None of the robot's creators appears willing to deal with the tragedy that is unfolding, and none will take responsibility to end it. Even when it has become clear that they may be the last of the humans to exist in the world, their only thought is to their own personal survival.

Frankenstein's creature is different from the robots in that he does not appear ordinary. He is human, but not human enough to be mistaken as such, as are the robots in Capek's play. James Naughton points out that Frankenstein's creature is really an ancestor to the robots. The purpose of the robots is different than that of the creature. Frankenstein has no role planned for his creature; there is no purpose to its formation, except to prove that it can be done. In contrast, Rossum has an idealistic purpose: the robots can be used to serve mankind. But, as Naughton observes, both creations are biological and not mechanical. This renders their creators god-like, since only God can create man. And while the creators have formed a biological being, they have themselves become mechanical and less human. Naughton states that "man is mocked, victimised and degraded by depersonalised, mechanistic man-made civilisation." But it is not the robots that have mocked man and mechanized his world; it is man who creates and then abandons responsibility that mocks himself and transforms humanity into machinery. When Busman attempts to use all the money the company has accumulated to pay for his escape and the others hope to buy their freedom by selling the robot formula, their actions demonstrate how dehumanized the creators have become. Similarly, when Victor Frankenstein allows his family to be murdered rather than speak out, he gives voice to the dehumanization of his actions.

Another creation, from the sixteenth century, designed to serve man was the Golem of Jewish legends. Although his purpose was intended to be noble (the Golem was to save the Jews from pogroms), like the robots, the Golem proved difficult to control. The Golem was also human in appearance and made from earth and other biological components. He was not mechanical; thus, once again, the creator, Rabbi Loew, is supplanting God to form a man. Loew's intent was worthy, but, as is the case with Frankenstein and Rossum, he failed to accept responsibility for his creation. Norma Comrada argues that there are many similarities between the Golem and Rossum's robots, and she points that these similarities include elements of Adam's creation. This reminder of man's creation by God suggests "a challenge to and competition with a higher power." But Comrada argues that there is another, more significant connection between robots and Golem. She quotes a Capek interview from 1935, where the playwright stated that "the Robot is the Golem made flesh by mass production." And yet, the robots are very different from the Golem: they never make claims to spiritual purpose and they are not designed to protect man, only to do his work. And they come to represent man's greed at its most offensive.

In this respect, the purpose of robots differs significantly from the other two earlier creation stories. Rabbi Loew never seeks any money for his creation, and Frankenstein never seeks to profit from his creature, in fact disclaiming knowledge of its existence. Only the robot's creators realize that capitalism and economic profit are the important

by-products of supplanting God. This changes the emphasis of the play back to the actions of the humans and away from the robots. And there is every reason to think that is what Capek intended. The robots proved to be both frightening and captivating when first introduced. They also provided the genesis for hundreds of robots and films that followed. The robots were so successful that their original purpose was forgotten. Capek is often quoted as saying that he wanted the play to focus on humanity, but, instead, it spawned an industry of robotic clones. William Harkins quotes Capek as saying that *R.U.R.* was "the worst of all his plays, one which he no longer wished to see on the stage." And Comrada says that Capek, "had become increasingly alarmed by the manner in which robots were perceived and portrayed in plays, films, and stories in various parts of the world." Naughton also quotes Capek as stating that *R.U.R.* "was concerned, 'not with Robots, but with people.'" He wanted to be able to say, "It was a great thing to be a man." But instead, his play questions the goodness of man. At the conclusion of Merritt Abrash's comparison between the 1923 translation of *R.U.R.* and a 1989 translation, Abrash points out that the new translation provides a clearer understanding of the role Capek intended for the robots. Abrash says that by restoring nearly twenty-five percent of preciously deleted text, the robots are diminished into just another plot device. Instead, the plot shifts its focus back to the humans, as Capek intended. The play then becomes a study in human behavior, since Abrash points out that the play becomes important when readers understand that it is not about how robots behave as robots, but about how robots behave when they become human that matters. In fact, the play is also about how humans behave when they abdicate responsibility for humanity. It is in their role as creators of men that humans fail. Capek was not opposed to science, but he was concerned with man's ability to control what he had created. His modern day creation story illustrates that responsibility for science continues to be as important as scientific discoveries it unearths.

Source: Sheri E. Metzger, for *Drama For Students,* Gale Group, 2000.

Critical Essay #2

Lewisohn reviews the 1922 London production of R.U.R., *terming the production a success as both a work of ideas and an entertaining evening of theatre*.

There are two kinds of notions in the world. There is the kind that hits you between the eyes; there is the kind that irradiates the soul. Thus there are two kinds of art. There is the art that dazzles and grows dark; there is the art that shines calmly and forever. It would be a sorry sort of affectation to deny one's natural interest in the merely striking and merely dazzling, especially when it is implicated with powerful forces beyond itself. But it is healthy and necessary to keep the difference in mind. I do not at all blame the Theater Guild for producing *"R. U.R."* by the Czechish playwright Karel Capek, especially in view of the quality of the production; I think it well for both the directors of the Guild and for ourselves to remember and, for a space, to realize the precise quality of the drama in question. The central idea has violence rather than creative energy. Punch is not power any more than a pine torch is a star. Punch, indeed, commonly goes with a lack of power. And the lack of authentic power in the central idea of *"R. U.R."* is borne out by the execution, which is a strange mixture of wavering brilliance and mere confusion.

What is Capek after? What, in plain language everything worth saying can be said thus does he want to tell? Something like this: An industrial civilization with its power concentrated in the persons of the captains of industry and war wants hands not minds, helots not men. It is secure and powerful in the measure in which the proletariat is degraded, insensitive, supine. That is obviously true and was worked out long ago in a melodramatic but quite telling way by Jack London in one of his not altogether deservedly forgotten books. Now, Capek's argument runs on, if ever this industrial civilization does succeed in reducing the proletariat to the level of mere mechanical helots, then the death of civilization will be upon us. For when these helots revolt they will destroy all things and values that represent the spirit of man. The squint at Russia is obvious; the complete absurdity of the argument equally so. For on the one hand we have the assumption that men can be reduced to the level of mere machines which, in the nature of things, would not revolt at all; on the other hand we are told that these helots will revolt against slavery, oppression, their own soulless estate, which at once reinvests them with all the passions, powers, and thoughts from which the triumphs of civilization St. Peter's and the Divine Comedy and the Ninth Symphony draw their origin.

In order to project his argument pictorially and dramatically Capek uses what may be called the Golem-Frankenstein device. Rossum, a great physiological chemist, invents a method of manufacturing man-like creatures who make good workers and soldiers but are without passions or self-originating thoughts. These "robots" are manufactured, bought, and sold as workers and, finally; as cannon-fodder. They soon vastly outnumber mankind whose birthrate declines to nothing since men cannot compete in cheapness or usefulness with the robots. They revolt this is the central absurdity slaughter all men left, but are doomed to extinction in their turn since the secret of their manufacture

is lost. This ending, which might be called logical were not the whole thing the reverse, is furthermore stultified by an epilogue in which a male and female robot suddenly become human and enter, a queer Adam and Eve, the dusty paradise left them.

There can be no question but that behind the play, as well as in a hundred details of the execution, a high and powerful passion, a far from ignoble imagination have been at work. *"R.U.R. "* is no ordinary work, Capek's no ordinary talent or intelligence. I have been at some pains to point out the brittleness of the argument, the confusion of the symbolism, because this brittleness and this confusion are very characteristic of a good deal of the minor serious drama of the hour. These plays come with an intellectual and poetic gesture which, upon analysis, is seen to be merely a gesture. Their turbid symbolism and specious arguments are in danger of making many people undervalue the literature which is humbler and truer, more concrete, and for that very reason more significant; not spectacular but sound.

Whatever the play has of imagination, weird-ness, beauty, horror is fully expressed if not indeed heightened by the settings, costumes, acting, directing at the Garrick. As an example of the art of the theater the production is exquisite in skill, sensitiveness, in the unemphatic completeness of its command of all the resources of that art. It deserves the utmost admiration and the closest attention; the play deserves the nine days' wonder of the proverb.

Source: Ludwig Lewisohn, "Helots" in the *Nation,* Vol. 115, no. 2991, November 1, 1922, p. 478.

Critical Essay #3

In this review of the London debut of Capek's play, the critic finds the dystopian drama to be "an exciting, thrilling play, which everyone will enjoy."

R.U.R. can hardly be better described than by its own subtitle, "A Fantastic Melodrama." Here and there the fact of its projection into the future, its touches of genuine satire, its digressions into speculation, make one mistake it for a play of ideas. Then it seems disappointing, and we perceive the thin places in plot and characterization. Especially did it seem a "let down" to me, for I have had the pleasure of watching some of the rehearsals of Mr. Karel Capek' s other piece, *The Insect Play,* which Mr. Playfair produces at the Regent on May 5th. Here the satire is vivid, and the humour light and delicate. In fine, it is in comparison with *The Insect Play* that we see what is wrong with *R. U.R.,* though it may be that *R.U.R.* will be esteemed the more taking piece. *R. U.R.* has much of the character of an early work. Its whole attitude is tentative and it takes obvious refuge in action and excitement from the difficulties both of sustained characterization and reflection. There is little character drawing in it. All the people are types, somewhat hazily conceived. The exasperating *ingénue*. Helena Glory, is the least successful, and they range up to Dr. Gall (head of the psychological department of Rossum' s Universal Robots) and Emma, Helena Glory's servant, and Jacob Berman, the chief cashier. But really it is a quibble to draw attention to these faults of the play, for once grant that it is to be melodrama, and not a play of ideas, it is extraordinarily good, and holds the spectators from beginning to end. The actual story also is a genuine effort of the imagination.

An old scientist has found out not merely how to produce life, but how to make tissues which can be infused with the life that he has made. He tries to imitate nature and makes an artificial dog. "That took him several years," explains one of the characters, sarcastically, "and resulted in a sort of stunted calf which died in a few days." Then he tried to make a man. But his nephew was a man of very different ideals. He saw that there was money in the idea. He saw that, given a slight twist, the formula would produce not men, but "Robots," living, intelligent, working machines. Young Rossum goes over the human anatomy and cuts out everything that is "unnecessary." A weaver does not need to play the piano and feel joy or sorrow; or love or hate. Young Rossum, then, produces Robots. The factory is a going concern. Helena Glory comes to the island where the R.U.R. factory is situated on behalf of a sentimental "League of Humanity," who are shocked at the material way in which Robots are looked upon. She sentimentalizes over their hard lot (they are sent back to the stamping mills and ground if they show any signs of inefficiency) and ends by marrying the General Manager, Harry Domain. But Dr. Gall is a scientist and missionary, and carries on the tradition of old Rossum rather than young Rossum. He pushes forward. He endows the Robots with pain, so that they shall not be careless and break their limbs. This is the beginning of the end. Pain proves the beginning of some sort of consciousness. Ten years after the opening scene of the play the Robots are turning upon the men who have made them and conquering the world, for men have ceased to be born, and the Robots now outnumber the human beings by a hundred to one. A thrilling scene ensues in which the

humans are besieged by the Robots, and finally overwhelmed, only one man surviving. But the secret of making Robots has been lost through the sentimental action of Helena Glory, who, before the catastrophe, has burned the formula.

Power has made the Robots still more like human beings. They only last twenty years, and their leaders are in agony lest the race of Robots should die out. They are machines and the formula has gone. But the anxiety, in its turn, has had its effect upon them, and the play ends with a young Robot and Robotess going out into the world suffering from new and unaccountable symptoms, such as inability to live without each other, willingness to sacrifice everything for the other's welfare, laughter and a quickened heart-beat. A new Adam and Eve have come back to the world.

An exciting, thrilling play, which everyone will enjoy. But the glamour over, to return to its faults. The part, played by old Rossum's formula is ludicrously like that of the "marriage lines" in the old-fashioned Lyceum melodrama. The tragedy is made to turn on their burning by the impulsive sentimental young wife, who has got them out of the strong box where they are kept. Now, Robots are supposed to be turned out by the hundred-thousand. Imagine a play in which the tragedy depends on Mr. Ford losing the formula for his motors! Manufacture in bulk would so patently involve at least some hundred printed copies of the formula that this flaw is worrying, and gives far more sense of unreality than a mere synthetic man. The second drawback is the extremely tiresome character of Helena Glory, played by Miss Frances Carson, whose pretty looks could do no more than make her bearable. The men characters all have a certain touch of imaginative largeness about them. Harry Domain, the manager, wants to make Robots so as to free the human race from the grind of monotonous labour. Dr. Gall is a scientist with enthusiasms. The half-comic cashier is yet a man not without grandeur and a sense of the hugeness of the machine for which he works. But Helena Glory is of the past; she is told nothing about the revolution, and her ten-year anniversary is being celebrated with pearl necklaces, cyclamens and so forth all through the exciting part. Her characteristic speech is, "Oh, Harry, I don't understand!" She would seem out of place in modern London, she is two or three centuries behind the life of the factory between 1950 and 1960. She interrupts the adventure story in the most exasperating way. The adult playgoer will feel almost a schoolboy irritation at the way in which she interferes with our enjoyment of the revolution scene, and in the way in which she is always on the stage. In exasperation we remember that she does not even fulfil the one function of the harem woman; she is childless. All this would be bearable if she were not so constantly in evidence.

Mr. Basil Rathbone looked very handsome as Harry Domain, but acted stiffly. Mr. Brember Wills's acting as Alquist, in the last act was too much reminiscent of his performance in *Heartbreak House*. Mr. Leslie Banks as a Robot, and Miss Beatrix Thomson as a Robotess, were admirable, and the entrance of the Robots at the end was most striking; indeed, I wish we could see more of them□they are really alarming and convincing monsters. I am sorry that Miss Olga Lindo, as Helena II., the Robotess through whom love comes back into the world, should have modelled her costume on the tradition of the opera stage, hair down, backward tilted pose and white nightgown.

The result is that to most people she does not look nearly so attractive as Sulla, the unemotional Robotess.

May I compliment the Reandean management on their news-sheet and programme, of which I had not previously seen a number? The cover of it is delightful, with its harmonious printing, and the contents are quite amusing.

Source: Anonymous, review of *R. U.R.* in the *Spectator,* Vol. 130, no. 4949, May 5, 1923, pp. 755-56.

Topics for Further Study

Discuss the ending of the play. Do the new Adam and Eve signify a hopeful ending? Why or why not?

Capek clearly had concerns about the possible misuse of technology. Discuss whether you think his concerns were justified.

Capek's robots created a new idea that has spawned many robots since these early creations. Trace the evolution of robots in Hollywood films.

Cloning raises many of the same questions that Capek was concerned about in this play. Investigate the ethical concerns that modern scientists and religious leaders have about creating life.

Compare and Contrast

1921: The first aircraft carrier is commissioned.

Today: During periods of threatened conflict, aircraft carriers supply off-sea staging areas for bombing runs. They greatly add to a country's ability to wage war.

1921: The Russian economy collapses, and Russian sailors attempt a bloody and unsuccessful mutiny.

Today: The economy of what was once the Soviet Union is in disarray, creating increased risk from an unpaid military establishment.

1921: Poliomyelitis (polio) is widespread in North America; it attacks U.S. Secretary of the Navy, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and will leave him crippled for life.

Today: Polio is almost completely eradicated due to immunizations, but as each disease is cured, new ones appear to take its place.

1921: Famine kills 3 million Russians, and corpses are piled twenty feet high waiting for burial.

Today: Famine continues to be a leading cause of death in the world as a result of weather disasters, such as hurricane Mitch, which destroyed much of Central America, and droughts which leave many starving in Africa.

1921: The Autobahn opens in Germany, and thousands of miles of new surfaced highways are built in the United States to accommodate the increase in automobiles since the end of the war.

Today: Citizens in both Europe and the United States take for granted the ready availability of automobiles and easy transportation that a major highway system offers.

What Do I Read Next?

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) evokes many of the same issues about human responsibility as does *R. U.R.* This novel also deals with questions about the future of humanity and asks serious questions about man's humanity to man.

Prometheus Bound, written by Aeschylus in the fifth century B.C., is an example from classical literature that explores how man deals with fate and with man's inhumanity toward man.

In *The Insect Play,* written in 1922, Capek uses insects to represent man's vices and weaknesses.

War With the Newts (1937) is often considered to be Capek's best novel. In this novel, man is challenged by that which he has created, just as in *R. U.R.*

Eugene O'Neill's *Dynamo* (1929) examines a man's obsession with technology and a machine he has created.

Further Study

Abrash, Merritt, "R.U.R. Restored and Reconsidered" in *Extrapolation: A Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy,* Vol. 32, no. 2, Summer 1991, pp. 184-92.

This article offers a comparison between translations and suggests that in early translations as much as twenty-five percent of the text was censored to removed suggestive sexual or political content.

Harkins, William E., *Karel Capek,* Columbia University Press, 1962.

This is the only book-length biography of Capek in English. It contains a lengthy discussion of his works as well.

Kussi, Peter, editor. *Toward the Radical Center: A Karel Capek Reader,* Catbird Press, 1990.

This is a collection of essays about Capek's work and also contains a new translation of the play.

Suvin, Darko. *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction,* Yale University Press, 1979.

This book discusses the development of science fiction as a genre and Capek's place within the genre.

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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.

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□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:

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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.

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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.

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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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