Sergeant Musgrave's Dance Study Guide

Sergeant Musgrave's Dance by John Arden

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Introduction

Serjeant Musgrave's Dance is regarded as John Arden's first important play. Yet interestingly, its initial British run at the Royal Court Theatre in 1959 was not particularly successful; it ran for only twenty-eight performances and was a financial disaster.

In 1966 *Serjeant Musgrave's* Dance came to New York City for an Off-Broadway run. Appearing at the Theatre de Lys, the play ran for 135 performances and eventually won the Vernon Rice Award. As a result, Arden's reputation as an innovative dramatist was firmly established.

Serjeant Musgrave 's Dance is set in a northern British mining town in 1880, but it draws from several contemporary sources for inspiration. Arden's pacifist theme and depiction of the negative aspects of army life on soldiers is seen to have universal significance.

Author Biography

On October 26, 1930, Arden was born in Barnsley, Yorkshire, England. The son of Charles Alwyn Arden, a glass factory manager, and Annie Elizabeth (nee Layland), a schoolteacher, Arden attended local schools until the beginning of World War II. For his safety, he was then sent to a public school in Sedbergh, Yorkshire.

After graduation, Arden served in the Army's Intelligence Corps for eighteen months. He then entered King's College at Cambridge University to study architecture. In 1953 he earned his B.A. and continued to study architecture at Edinburgh College of Art in Scotland.

In Edinburgh, Arden wrote his first play, All Fall Down, for a college drama group. After receiving his diploma in 1955, he moved to London to work as an architect's assistant.

By 1957 Arden's plays were being produced. The first was The Waters of Babylon, an experimental piece that utilized verse and song. With the initial success of his playwrighting career, Arden quit architecture and became a full-time writer. He also married Margaretta D'Arcy, an actress and political activist. Under D'Arcy's influence, Arden's plays took on a more political bent.

After completing a commission for the Royal Court Theatre, The Waters of Babylon (1958), he wrote what was arguably his most important stage play, SerjeantMusgrave 's Dance (1959). Though it was not initially successful, many critics and scholars came to view the play as a prime example of Arden's style.

Many of Arden's subsequent plays were historical in nature. They included his first truly successful play, Armstrong's Last Goodnight (1964), as well as The Hero Rises Up: A Romantic Melodrama (1969), and The Island of the Might (1972).

Today he continues to write plays as well as novels and radio plays. He and his family live in Ireland.

Plot Summary

Act I: Scene One

Serjeant Musgrave's Dance opens on a wharf in the north of England in 1880. Three British Army soldiers Hurst, Attercliffe, and Sparky are nervously waiting for the arrival of their superior officer, Serjeant Musgrave. The Bargee (barge driver) appears first, ready to drive the three soldiers to their destination on his barge. Musgrave arrives and the men depart.

Act I: Scene Two

At a public house in a small mining town, the Bargee enters and announces the soldiers' arrival to the pub's owner, Mrs. Hitchcock, and the Parson. The Parson infers that the soldiers have been sent to intercede in the local miner's strike. The Bargee tells him that they have come to recruit soldiers.

After the Parson leaves, the Bargee tells Mrs. Hitchcock and her barmaid, Annie, that the soldiers will stay at the pub or a nearby barn. Annie is apprehensive of the soldier's presence.

The soldiers enter. While they relax, the Mayor (who also owns the mine), Constable, and Parson enter the pub. The Mayor decides to use the soldiers to recruit the men who have caused trouble in his mine. The Constable wants to use the soldiers against the strikers, but the Mayor refuses.

After the officials leave, Musgrave asks Mrs. Hitchcock if she knew Billy Hicks. She tells him that Hicks had impregnated Annie before leaving to join the military and fight overseas. Eventually the baby died. Musgrave and his men leave to explore the town.

Act I: Scene Three

The four soldiers meet up in the churchyard and compare notes on the town. They agree that the townspeople are resentful and fearful of them. Three colliers (coal miners) threaten the soldiers, accusing them of coming to break the miner's strike. Musgrave assures them that they are not.

When the colliers leave, Musgrave begins to reveal his true plan take revenge on the town for Hicks's death and to drive home the hardships of military life. The soldiers are worried that they will be arrested before they can achieve their goal. Musgrave draws a parallel between their cause and the corruption in the town.

After filling them in on the plan, he tells them to remain relatively sober during their recruiting party that night. The Bargee overhears the truth about Musgrave's mission.

Act II: Scene One

At Mrs. Hitchcock's pub, the recruiting party is in full swing. Sparky hits on Annie but she rebuffs him; his fellow soldiers warn him that he has had enough to drink. Hurst shows up, still unsure of their mission. Annie showers attention on him, offering herself for the night. He accepts.

The Constable closes the party, but the colliers do not want the bar to close. One of the colliers attacks the Constable. The soldiers intercede, and the colliers and Bargee are removed from the pub. Sparky's drunken actions annoy the other soldiers, who start arguing among themselves. Sparky begs Annie to come to bed with him that night. Musgrave tells Annie to leave his men alone.

Act II: Scene Two

On the street the Bargee tries to lead the drunken colliers in military drills. Musgrave watches them. When Walsh, a leader of the colliers, passes by and makes fun of the soldiers, the Bargee tells Walsh he knows where to get weapons.

Act II: Scene Three

Inside the barn, Annie tries to get into bed with Hurst. He rebuffs her, and she becomes angry. When Attercliffe appears, she begs for his affections. After kissing her several times, he also snubs her. Annie begins to cry.

Sparky tries to comfort her, but Annie is not interested in him until he admits he is scared. She tells him about Hicks and their baby. As they share their fears, they become passionate.

He confides to Annie the real reason they are in town and tries to convince her to run away with him. Hurst overhears and confronts Sparky. As the argument escalates, Attercliffe gets involved and accidentally stabs Sparky to death with his own bayonet. Attercliffe is horrified by his actions.

Musgrave and Mrs. Hitchcock enter the barn. Musgrave orders Attercliffe and Hurst to bury Sparky in the backyard. He has Mrs. Hitchcock lock Annie up in a safe place.

The Bargee arrives and informs Musgrave that someone is breaking the windows of the coachhouse where their weapons are located. Alarmed, the soldiers leave and then return with Walsh. The soldiers beg Musgrave to change the plan because of Sparky's death, but he will not.

The Mayor and Parson arrive. The Mayor says that the telegraph has been fixed and the dragoons are coming in twelve hours to quell violence. Musgrave proposes a recruitment rally in the streets to distract everyone.

Act III: Scene One

The next morning, the rally begins and Musgrave takes the stage to talk about the life of a soldier. He shows the crowd a Galling gun, and has Attercliffe load it. Musgrave describes the horrible conditions that soldiers live in, and how duty comes before all else. In a dramatic sequence, the skeleton of Billy Hicks is revealed, hung by a noose from a flagpole. Everyone present is shocked.

Musgrave informs the crowd that they have to stay or his men will shoot them. Musgrave chronicles the story of how Hicks was killed by civilians, and in retaliation, five civilians were killed. Musgrave invites Walsh up to speak, assuming he will be sympathetic but he is not. The town does not understand his message.

Musgrave announces that killing twenty-five townspeople will be a just revenge for Hicks's death. Attercliffe is repulsed by Musgrave's words this had not been part of the original plan. No one is sure about Musgrave's message except Annie, who reveals the circumstances of Sparky's death.

Dragoons kill Hurst. Musgrave and Attercliffe are arrested.

Act III: Scene Two

In prison, Musgrave refuses food. He is still haunted by Hicks's death and the death of the five civilians. Mrs. Hitchcock tells him that his message will be remembered by the townspeople.

Act 1, Scene 1

Act 1, Scene 1 Summary

Sparky, Hurst and Attercliffe wait on a wharf. Hurst and Attercliffe play cards as Sparky keeps watch, wondering how long "Black Jack Musgrave" is going to be. Attercliffe assures him Musgrave will be on time, and Sparky sings a song about desertion. Attercliffe tells him he shouldn't sing that song, but Sparky keeps singing. Hurst loses his temper, telling him to shut up. Sparky jokes that the others are afraid that "he" will hear the song, referring to a nearby box. Hurst tells Attercliffe to focus on the game.

The Bargee arrives. His conversation with the soldiers reveals that he is the man from whom the soldiers rented a barge to take them and their crates up the canal. He says he's ready to go, but the soldiers say they won't leave until Musgrave is there. As they load the boxes onto the barge, they argue with the Bargee about where to put them. The Bargee quickly becomes angry, but Musgrave comes in and tells him to calm down.

Attercliffe reports to Musgrave that the Gatling gun has been loaded and then goes with the others onto the barge. Musgrave and the Bargee talk about the weather, about the second Gatling gun to be loaded and about how this is the soldiers' first visit to the coal mining north country. The Bargee says it's cold and bleak up there, but Musgrave says it doesn't matter, the soldiers have their duty. He and the Bargee get on the barge and prepare to cast off.

Act 1, Scene 1 Analysis

This scene is the beginning of a literal and spiritual journey for Musgrave and his men. The literal journey, as the Bargee says, takes them into the bleak north of England. The spiritual journey takes them into their own bleak souls, where they encounter one of the darkest of human emotions, guilt. What awaits them at the end of both journeys is foreshadowed by the references to the Gatling gun (a machine gun with multiple barrels), to the "he" in the box (eventually revealed to be a dead comrade), to desertion as sung about in Sparky's song and to duty as referred to in Musgrave's speech.

Act 1, Scene 2

Act 1, Scene 2 Summary

This scene is set in a small, north country pub. Mrs. Hitchcock, the pub's landlady, tries to convince the Parson to intervene in a local coal miner's strike, saying that the men not working is ruining both her business and the town. The Parson says that in times of difficulty it's better that people not drink, and he advocates shutting down all the pubs completely. He's on his way out when the Bargee comes in and tells the Parson that soldiers have arrived. The Parson becomes concerned, assuming that the soldiers are there to break the strike and that their arrival means violence will begin. The Bargee tells him that they've actually come recruiting, and he hints that they might still be useful. The Parson sees his point, apparently understanding that some of the strikers might be recruited and therefore gotten out of the way. He tips the Bargee, thanks him for the information and goes out.

The Bargee orders a drink, and Mrs. Hitchcock tells Annie, the barmaid, to pour it for him. The Bargee flirts roughly with Annie, and she tells him to behave himself, adding that soldiers are good for nothing but being dropped into their graves and making women cry. She runs out weeping just as a drum announcing the soldiers' arrival is heard.

Sparky comes in asking for rooms, saying that the soldiers are there on the Queen's business and that Her Majesty will pay. Mrs. Hitchcock says she can accommodate them all and that they can put their gear in a coach-house across the yard. Sparky shouts directions to the others out the door and then orders drinks for the soldiers, the Bargee and Mrs. Hitchcock. Since Annie is still weeping, Mrs. Hitchcock pours the drinks herself. Musgrave, Hurst and Attercliffe then come in, having stowed the crates. They drink a toast to the Queen, and Mrs. Hitchcock tells them about the strike.

The Constable, the Mayor and the Parson come in, looking for the soldiers. The Mayor greets Musgrave and says that he has come seeking his help. Before they can talk, he needs to speak privately with the Parson. Musgrave and the others go into the back with Mrs. Hitchcock. The Mayor and the Parson discuss the strike, and the Mayor reveals that he plans to use the soldiers as a distraction for the town so that the people will have something on their minds other than their resentment at being out of work. The Parson disapproves, saying that the soldiers are intended to serve with honor not as tools, but the Mayor overrules him. He also overrules the Constable, who says that there's been violence in the town and that the town needs patrols. The Mayor says they'll try things his way first, and if that doesn't work only then will they try patrols.

The Constable calls Musgrave back in, and the Mayor gives him permission to recruit, adding that for every recruit signed, both the recruit and the soldiers will be compensated. Musgrave agrees. They talk about how and when the recruiting will happen, and the Mayor and Constable say they can give Musgrave some names to

start with. The Mayor and Constable then leave. The Parson warns Musgrave that he wants the soldiers to behave themselves in terms of both drinking and women, and Musgrave promises that they will all behave, saying he's a religious man. Pleased, the Parson goes out.

Mrs. Hitchcock comes back in, surprised that everyone has left already. She says that the other soldiers are eating in the back and wants to know where Musgrave wants to be served. Musgrave says he'll eat where he is and then asks whether there are many in the town who have volunteered to be soldiers in the past. Mrs. Hitchcock tells him not too many and then sings a short song about a yellow haired boy who went off to war. Annie comes in and gives Musgrave his dinner. She sings him a song that ends with a teasing reference to being afraid that he's got a brother and then goes out again. Musgrave comments that Annie might have a point and then asks Mrs. Hitchcock whether a young man named Hickson or something similar came from this town.

Mrs. Hitchcock remembers a boy named Billy Hicks, a good boy with some bad habits. She reveals that he made Annie pregnant and that the child died young at about the same time as the town heard that Billy had been killed. Musgrave says he served with Hicks but didn't really know him well. He calls the others out from the back, saying it's time to go look through the town. He tells Mrs. Hitchcock not to mention Hicks to the other soldiers, saying that the dead should be left to rest. The other soldiers come in, and Musgrave gives them their orders to investigate the town. They go out, leaving Mrs. Hitchcock alone.

Act 1, Scene 2 Analysis

A defining element of both the plot and the theme is set in motion in this scene with the introduction of the strike. Musgrave and his men are drawn into a conflict not of their making. Aside from laying the foundation for the play's central dramatic action, the situation represents the way that soldiers in general, and these men in particular, are forced to fight in wars for purposes other than their own. From a metaphorical, thematic perspective, this is violence done to men's wills, which leads to violence done to other men's bodies. On one level, the story of Hicks illustrates what happens to men in those circumstances, but it also has a second, deeper purpose.

The next scene reveals that the "he" in the box is actually Hicks. It's also revealed that Hicks' death is the cause of the guilt felt by Musgrave and his men, which is in turn the motivation for their twisted attempts at redeeming themselves at the play's climax. Musgrave is lying when he says to Mrs. Hitchcock that he didn't know Hicks well and when he displays little or no reaction to news that Hicks was the father of Annie's baby. His comment about letting the dead rest is also deeply ironic, in that his actions later illustrate how he's unable to let Hicks rest at all. The relationship between all the things we find out later and what is apparent in this scene can be defined as subtext, unspoken facts, feelings or circumstances that color what is said in a scene, how it's said and why it's said. The conversation between Musgrave and Mrs. Hitchcock is filled with subtext, all of which foreshadows later events and circumstances in the play.

The Queen referred to in this scene is Queen Victoria, who governed England at the time the play is set, the mid-to-late 1800s.

Act 1, Scene 3

Act 1, Scene 3 Summary

This scene is set in a churchyard. Hurst appears, followed by a Slow Collier who asks how many soldiers there are. He describes soldiers in negative terms and then goes out. Musgrave appears, followed shortly by Attercliffe and Sparky, all coming in from different directions. They talk about what they found on their exploration of the town. People run from them, and the streets are virtually empty. Other clear signs show they're not welcome. Musgrave says that nevertheless everything's as it should be, but Hurst angrily reminds Musgrave that they're on the run, that the money they stole is running out and that maybe people have heard the truth about them.

Musgrave becomes angry, and Attercliffe tries to calm him, saying that they're all loyal to him but they've got a right to know what he has planned. Musgrave tells them the only right they have is to be swinging at the end of a noose, reminding the others that they're deserters and that they're in his power, which he says is the power of God. Hurst says he doesn't believe in God. When he met Musgrave and the others, he just thought they were all tired of fighting, the same as him, and wanted to let people know just how badly the army treats its soldiers. Musgrave angrily tells him that that message is nothing without the Word of God. Hurst gives in, asking Musgrave what he wants them all to do.

The Slow Collier and two other colliers appear, warning the soldiers that their town and their strike are their business, and if they interfere there will be trouble. Musgrave tells them they aren't there to break the strike and invites the colliers to join them at Mrs. Hitchcock's, where he will pay for the drinks. The colliers refuse his invitation and go. Attercliffe comments that the colliers hate them, but Musgrave explains that their hate is the result of what they think the soldiers are there for. He explains that once the soldiers have done what they really came to do, expose the corruption of the Mayor and of the war, the colliers' hatred will disappear. Attercliffe says they have to expose the corruption of all war, but Musgrave says that this is no time for generalities; they're here to deal with one war. He orders Sparky to say again why they came to this particular town. Sparky says automatically that they're there because Billy Hicks was his friend and got killed. He talks about how he was drunk for four days after Billy died, how Musgrave told him there was a way to get over his grief and guilt and how together they planned to come back to Billy's home town to expose the people there to the realities of war. He begins to mock Hurst, saying he never knew Billy, but Musgrave orders him to be quiet, reminding him that he's a soldier, that he's got discipline and that he's under his command.

Musgrave then delivers a long speech in which he reminds his soldiers of their purpose, detailing how it can and will be accomplished and how when they're done the town will be purified of all corruption, the mayor's corruption and the corruption of this war. Attercliffe says again that it has to be about all wars, saying that after one night's killing he had enough and said to himself no more. Hurst eagerly says it's time for them to do

their own killing, but Musgrave angrily shouts him down, saying that they are there in the company of God's Word, that they must "let the word dance" and that God will provide. He describes their mission as "the ... deserter's duty." He then tells them to go into the pub, be charming and polite and not get drunk.

Attercliffe leads the others out. The Bargee appears unnoticed as Musgrave prays, asking for God's guidance and help in keeping his mind clear so he can make the Dance as terrible as he believes God wants it to be. He prays for strength, saying that the Lord will provide, and then goes out. He still has not noticed the Bargee, who whispers a sarcastic amen as Musgrave leaves.

Act 1, Scene 3 Analysis

Two important aspects of the play's story are developed in this scene. The first is the conflict between the colliers (coal miners) and the soldiers. The second is what's revealed about the soldiers' background and purpose, their plans to ease their intense feelings of guilt through convincing the town of the folly of war and also the origin of that guilt. Their arrival in this town is revealed to be no coincidence but part of a larger scheme put in place by Musgrave for reasons which at first seem noble but which, by the end of the play, clearly have a darker purpose.

In the first part of his speech, Musgrave seems to be intent upon reminding his men to stick to their plan. He inspires them with words of God in an attempt to convince them that they're on a holy mission and that they're doing their true duty as opposed to the duty as a soldier they've done up to now. When he's alone, however, his language changes. His repeated use of the word "terrible" sounds more Old Testament than New, more God of Judgment than God of hope, more revenge than redemption. This emerging sense of darkness foreshadows both Musgrave's apparent madness at the end of the play and the confrontations triggered by that madness.

Act 2, Scene 1

Act 2, Scene 1 Summary

This scene takes place in the pub. Musgrave sits quietly. Mrs. Hitchcock watches, and Annie does the serving as the Bargee, the soldiers and the colliers drink, dance and shout. Sparky sings a song about army life as the Slow Collier tells Musgrave that his signing up is only provisional, and the Pugnacious Collier tells Attercliffe that he's a married man. The Slow Collier makes a pass at Annie, who pushes him away. He drunkenly grabs the Pugnacious Collier and starts to dance.

Musgrave stands and calls for everyone's attention, reminding them all that even though the Queen is paying for the drinks, none of the men are under any obligation to join up. He says that at the end of the evening, those that are truly willing will be welcome. The Bargee gets out a harmonica and sings a song that refers to Crooked Old Joe, saying that the Lord provides. Musgrave asks him sharply what he means, but the Bargee says he's only joking and then goes out.

Sparky does a card trick for Annie, but she's not impressed. He then tries to tell her a joke, but she doesn't laugh and walks away. Musgrave tells Sparky he's had enough to drink, and Sparky says he hasn't. Hurst arrives after spending time alone on the riverbank and angrily tells Musgrave that words aren't enough to do what they need to do. Musgrave tells him to do as he's told, go to the bar and get to work recruiting.

Annie gives Hurst a drink as Mrs. Hitchcock shouts out that she needs to be paid. As Musgrave counts his cash, he's watched by Attercliffe, who comments that their money is running short. Musgrave tells him not to worry and pays Mrs. Hitchcock. Meanwhile, Annie flirts with Hurst, saying that if he wants her she'll come to him tonight. Hurst seems interested, although he brags that he's had better women than her. Sparky starts a new card trick, but he is stopped before too long by the re-entrance of the Bargee, who says it's time to close.

Mrs. Hitchcock challenges his authority, but then the Constable comes in and again says it's closing time. The colliers challenge him, and the soldiers try to calm them. The Constable insists, saying that the magistrates issued the order that evening that the pubs are to close early for the duration of the strike. The Pugnacious Collier goes after him, and Attercliffe and Musgrave hold him back. Attercliffe over-reacts to the attack, saying that killing is everywhere. The Constable throws the colliers and the Bargee out the door. Musgrave calms Attercliffe and then tells the Constable he'll make sure his men get to bed. The Constable says that the Mayor has imposed a curfew, adding that the Mayor also gave him a few names to pass on to Musgrave in the hopes that they'll be recruited. Musgrave tells him he's only there for volunteers, and the Constable hints that that doesn't necessarily mean anything. He orders drinks from Mrs. Hitchcock, insisting that she pour them even when she reminds him the bar is closed.

Sparky makes jokes about how accommodating and generous the Queen is for paying for all these drinks. Attercliffe angrily tells him to be quiet, and Hurst asks him what's wrong. Attercliffe reminds him that a man was just about killed a few moments ago and reminds Hurst that killing is what they've come to town to stop. He then says he's going out to the coach house, adding that out there is a man who doesn't talk foolishly. As he goes, Sparky jokes about Attercliffe and Billy having a sing-along, but Hurst tells him to be quiet. Sparky teases him about being scared, but Hurst says he's just got things on his mind and turns away. Sparky turns to Annie, says he doesn't know what he's doing there and then suddenly jokes about how their beds are made up in the stable. He invites Annie to come for a ride with him. Annie refuses. Hurst, who has dropped off to sleep, suddenly jolts awake after a nightmare.

Meanwhile, Musgrave and the Constable have been talking. Musgrave concludes their conversation by saying again that he won't allow men to sign up if they've been coerced, adding that people who create tension in the town are likely to create tension in the army as well. He's not sure he wants them. He bids the Constable good night, and the Constable goes out. Musgrave turns to Annie and orders her to not distract his men, saying they've got their duty and adding that he's a religious man and knows how to be strong when he has to be. Annie sings him a mocking song, and then Mrs. Hitchcock tells her to go to bed. She does. Musgrave tells his soldiers to do the same, and they go out, Sparky singing one last drunken song as he goes.

Act 2, Scene 1 Analysis

In the middle of the singing and the drinking, the flirtations and the fisticuffs, a few important points are raised. The first is the Bargee's reference to Crooked Old Joe, another name for the Devil. Its use in this song suggests that the devil can disguise his evil work with pious words. Musgrave's reaction suggests that for at least a moment, he's wondering whether the Bargee is referring to the work he's there to do, perhaps even wondering whether he really is doing God's work. His resolve remains firm, though, as indicated by his reaction to Attercliffe later in the scene. The Bargee's reference proves accurate, however, when the action of the play reveals what Musgrave's purpose in coming to the town really is.

A second important point is a satirical one. The clumsy dances of the colliers mock the idea of Musgrave's dance and also foreshadow the dance following the play's climax in Act 3. A third point arises from the comment Attercliffe makes about the funds running short. This raises the stakes for Musgrave, in that a shortage of money means he has less time to accomplish his goal of convincing the town of the follies of war. A fourth point is the conversation between Annie and Hurst, which foreshadows the encounter they have in the following scene.

Perhaps the most important of all these points can be found in Attercliffe's reaction to the Pugnacious Collier's attack on the Constable. It suggests that Attercliffe is the most highly strung and on-edge of all the soldiers, and it also suggests that Attercliffe is the only member of the group with a moral need to accomplish their mission. This

foreshadows his appearance in the final scene of the play, in which he's clearly the only one of his comrades unafraid of his conscience. At the same time, the conversation between Attercliffe, Hurst and Sparky reveals that as hard as Musgrave tries he can't control the thoughts and feelings of his men. Hurst is still clearly frustrated at not being able to vent his anger in more violence. Attercliffe seems to be even more passionate about ending the killing than Musgrave, and Sparky seems determined to deny that any tension exists at all. The emotional circumstances of these three men foreshadow the confrontations and tragedies of the following scene.

Musgrave's conversation with Annie shows again how determined he is to do God's work and how focused he is on his mission. The intensity of his preaching reinforces the impression gained earlier that he's close to madness, if not mad already. The possibility that Musgrave is insane becomes more likely in the next scene, which reveals how deeply troubled he is by what happened to Billy Hicks.

Act 2, Scene 2

Act 2, Scene 2 Summary

The Bargee, the Pugnacious Collier and the Slow Collier perform a drunken, mocking military drill. Musgrave appears and watches, as does another collier named Walsh. As Musgrave leaves, he collides with Walsh, who confronts him about why he's really there. Before Musgrave can answer, the Pugnacious Collier shouts out that Musgrave, in spite of having stripes on his sleeve, is a real man. Walsh says he's ashamed that the colliers are drunk on Musgrave's money, but Musgrave tells him angrily that the two of them are brothers in God. All Walsh has to do to see the truth is watch. Walsh laughs at him mockingly, and Musgrave insists again that they're brothers and then goes out.

As Musgrave and Walsh have been talking, the Slow Collier and the Pugnacious Collier have gotten into a fight and run out arguing. Walsh comments to the Bargee that it's disgusting what Musgrave did to his "brothers" in the bar that night, but the Bargee tells him that when the time comes they'll do the right thing. He then suggests that Crooked Joe is in town, hinting that if Walsh wants a riot he can have one and offering to show him where he can get a Gatling gun. Walsh is interested, and the two men go out.

Act 2, Scene 2 Analysis

The drill performed by the colliers and the Bargee mocks not only the soldiers but symbolically mocks their mission as well, suggesting that it's as foolish as their drunken attempts at precision and discipline. Like the conversation between the three soldiers in the previous scene, the mock drill suggests that Musgrave doesn't have as much control as he thinks he does, an idea reinforced by the brief conversation between the Bargee and Walsh at the end of this scene. The nearly insane intensity of Musgrave's convictions appears again in this conversation, which in turn foreshadows the climactic confrontation at the end of the play between Walsh and Musgrave. It also foreshadows Musgrave's true purposes.

Act 2, Scene 3, Part 1

Act 2, Scene 3, Part 1 Summary

One part of the stage is divided into areas representing the stables where Attercliffe, Sparky and Hurst are to sleep. Another part of the stage represents Musgrave's bedroom. Musgrave sits on the edge of his bed and reads as Sparky and Hitch undress and prepare to sleep. They comment on how there's a light on in Musgrave's room, which means he's still awake. Hurst has Annie coming to visit him, and it will be hard for Sparky to listen to the two of them going at it. As Sparky sings a song about having an affair with a woman and her husband discovering them, Annie appears and goes to Hurst. Meanwhile, Musgrave blows out his candle and goes to sleep.

Annie tells Hurst she's there so they'll both be warm through the night. Hurst asks what about the morning, and she says they're all the same in the morning, cold and alone. She moves towards him, but he tells her to go away. They argue bitterly. Annie refers to herself as a soldier's whore, something different from a regular whore, and says that she's been called life and love by a soldier before. Hurst tells her that he's got to be strong and keep himself ready to follow Musgrave's orders. He pushes her away. Attercliffe, who has just come in, catches her and kisses her face and neck. She doesn't resist, and Attercliffe soon stops, saying that Musgrave is right when he says that all the loving in the world won't cleanse a murderer's hands. He talks his wife. She cheated on him with a grocer who was ugly but took care of her, something he never did. As a result, he says, he became a soldier. He finishes by suggesting that in his life and in what his wife did there's still blood and killing. He lies down and goes to sleep.

Sparky calls Annie to him and tries to convince her to lie with him instead of Hurst, confessing that his laughing and joking are all a cover-up for his fear and grief. As he talks, Musgrave groans and mutters in his sleep, reciting a number of men, women and children. Annie tells Sparky about her relationship with a soldier (whom we understand to be Hicks) and how it left three people dead - him, her baby and her. This leads Sparky to suggest that if he and Annie got together, it might make things better for both of them. That would mean he wouldn't have to abide by Musgrave's plan. They embrace again as Musgrave shouts out "Fire!"

Mrs. Hitchcock appears and tries to wake Musgrave from his dream, but he goes on about London burning, how they've got a book with the names of people they've got to kill, and how he's counting down to the end of the world. He counts down to one, screams and collapses. Mrs. Hitchcock wakes him up, and as he sips the hot drink she brought him, he talks with increasing emotion about how as a soldier you have to listen for the word you're given, otherwise you end up lost and separated from your mates. Mrs. Hitchcock calms him down.

Sparky tells Annie a story with a moral that suggests that a person doesn't have to follow the lead of another just because he's agreed. Then he suggests that the two of

them run off to London to avoid what he's afraid is Musgrave's dangerous plan. She agrees to go with him, but as they're getting ready to go, Sparky can't find his trousers. Hurst appears with them, saying that Sparky can't be allowed to desert his mates. Attercliffe wakes up and tries to intervene as Sparky grabs for his trousers and pushes Hurst, who falls with his hand on Sparky's bayonet. Annie, Hurst, Attercliffe and Sparky all struggle. Attercliffe gets hold of the bayonet and accidentally stabs Sparky, who screams as he falls dead. Musgrave hears the scream and runs out of his room, telling Mrs. Hitchcock to stay where she is.

Act 2, Scene 3, Part 1 Analysis

The idea of redemption shows up in several ways in this scene as the soldiers and Annie struggle to redeem themselves for their past actions. Annie and Sparky both hope that loving each other sexually and then running away so they can build a life together on the basis of that love will balance out and redeem the evil that's happened in their lives. Attercliffe's comments suggest that redemption of any kind is impossible, an idea reinforced by Sparky's death. Hurst's comments suggest that redemption is only possible in following Musgrave's orders. The intensity of Musgrave's nightmare suggests that the acts he needs to redeem are so extreme that they call for an extreme act of redemption. This foreshadows what we discover about his redemptive acts in later scenes.

Musgrave's nightmare and his comments to Mrs. Hitchcock contain several elements of symbolism and foreshadowing. The numbers of men, women and children that he mentions are the exact numbers of injuries caused by a key incident involving Musgrave and his men that's recounted at the play's climax. London represents England, while the reference to it burning represents the way that the foundations of belief for both him and his men, English laws and loyalties, have been or are being destroyed by the killing they've done. The suggestion of a list of people they've got to kill represents and foreshadows the act of redemption they undertake in the following scene, showing people the hell of war by actually killing them. The counting down represents getting to the end of the list of victims and at last being redeemed. Finally, his comments about listening to the word represent both the way he feels commanded by the Word of God and, on a more literal level, the word that soldiers listen for on the drilling field when they're marching, an aspect of military life satirized in the drunken drill performed by the Bargee and the colliers earlier.

Musgrave's comments about being apart from his men function on several levels. They represent Musgrave's own madness, which separates him from both his men and his fellow human beings. They also represent Hicks, who is separated from the world by death, while the idea of listening to the Word represents the way that Musgrave is committed to listening to what he thinks is the Word of God so he won't become separated from God's mission for him.

As mentioned, the death of Sparky represents the death of hope for redemption, and as such it foreshadows Musgrave's failed attempts at redeeming himself at the play's

climax. The fact that he is fatally stabbed with his own bayonet by his comrade-in-arms is the play's first statement of its thematic point, which is that attempting to end violence with violence results in even more violence.

Act 2, Scene 3, Part 2

Act 2, Scene 3, Part 2 Summary

As Hurst accuses Attercliffe of killing Sparky, Musgrave arrives and demands to know what happened. Hurst explains that Sparky was deserting with Annie. Musgrave orders Attercliffe and Hurst to take Sparky's body into the yard and hide it. He speaks cruelly to Annie, and when Mrs. Hitchcock brings Musgrave his uniform, he tells her to take Annie upstairs and lock her away. When Mrs. Hitchcock notices all the blood, Musgrave tells her to ask no questions. Mrs. Hitchcock leads Annie off, saying she's got to trust him.

The Bargee appears, refers to himself as Old Joe, and tells Musgrave that instead of having his men messing around out back they should be paying attention to the coach house, where people are trying to break in and steal their gear. Musgrave shouts to his men to go to the coach house and goes out to help them. The Bargee narrates what he sees as the soldiers grab Walsh. They bring him onstage with them, and the Bargee asks about the others. Musgrave says they ran away. Shouting and whistles are heard, and Hurst comments that it must be the Constable and the night watchmen chasing down the other men breaking into the coach house.

The Bargee whispers to Musgrave that he was the one who warned Musgrave about the theft and that he deserves a reward. Musgrave dismisses him and then tells Walsh to watch what happens next so that he'll see Musgrave meant what he said about being brothers. He orders Hurst to take Walsh away, and as they go Mrs. Hitchcock runs in, panicking about the Constable. Musgrave tells her he's got everything under control. Attercliffe then tells Musgrave that because Sparky's dead everything's evened out, but Musgrave tells him he's wrong.

The Constable appears, asking what's in the coach house. As Musgrave is telling him that's where he's got his gear, the Parson appears, looking for the Constable. The Constable explains that he thinks that rioting because of the strike has begun. The Mayor hurries in, anxious to hear how long the Constable thinks he and his watch can hold out and saying that he's called in some dragoons (soldiers) to help. Musgrave says that with the help of his men, they can keep the town calm for about six hours by starting a recruiting meeting. He suggests they make a big deal out of it, with flags, music and speeches, and that they do so early in the morning. He calls out for flags and his uniform. Hurst appears with his drum and plays, and everyone gets caught up in Musgrave's enthusiasm. He concludes by shouting out "GOD SAVE THE QUEEN."

Act 2, Scene 3, Part 2 Analysis

Once again in the middle of a scene busy with physical action, certain important elements appear. One is the Bargee's reference to himself as Old Joe. While his name may or not actually be Joe, the fact that he refers to himself by a term that he previously

used to refer to the Devil suggests that on some level he is the Devil, a troublemaker and double-crosser. Remember that he was the one who told Walsh about the contents of the coach house in the first place, at the end of Act 2 Scene 2. In other words, for whatever reason the Bargee wants there to be trouble in this town, and he sets about making sure it happens. Perhaps he just wants the reward he asks Musgrave for, but whatever his motivation, it's clear that the Bargee represents trouble and mockery.

Another important point that could easily be missed in all the comings and goings of this scene is the brief exchange between Attercliffe and Musgrave in which Attercliffe suggests that Sparky's death "wipes the whole thing out." It can be understood from this comment that an aspect of Musgrave's mission to this town is to even the balance, an eye for an eye, a death for a death. Attercliffe takes this idea even further, suggesting that the death of one soldier (Sparky) redeems the death of another (Hicks). Musgrave's refusal to accept Attercliffe's suggestion illustrates again that he's got something darker in mind, an idea also foreshadowed by his strangely heightened enthusiasm for the recruiting party the next day, which he knows, and we suspect, he intends to use for purposes that have nothing to do with recruiting.

The stakes are raised again for Musgrave with the Mayor's announcement that he's summoned the dragoons. Musgrave has to get done what he came to do and get out of the town before they arrive, since they'll know that Musgrave and the others are guilty of desertion and robbery and ought to be tried. This is another reason Musgrave's excitement at the end of this scene is extreme. It's fueled by desperation.

Act 3, Scene 1, Part 1

Act 3, Scene 1, Part 1 Summary

In the town square, Hurst beats his drum. Attercliffe is putting the finishing touches on the podium, and Musgrave, the Mayor, the Pastor and the Constable climb up to where the podium stands, ready to make their speeches. Also on the platform are the soldiers' boxes, draped with flags and rope. The Bargee stands in front of the platform, urging the crowd (the audience) into enthusiastic responses. Mrs. Hitchcock appears with a keg of beer and some tankards, and the Bargee says there will be free beer for everyone later.

The Mayor steps forward. Over jeers from an offstage crowd, interpreted by the Bargee, he says that he isn't there to talk about the strike. He has come instead to introduce Sergeant Musgrave, there to recruit soldiers to serve the Queen. The Parson quotes the Bible, telling the crowd that to serve in the army is to serve God, that there is no higher responsibility and that to fight is to fight God's war. Musgrave proposes that he speak next and explain what duties might be expected of any who sign up. Before he can go on, the Slow Collier and Pugnacious Collier appear, making sure they aren't officially signed up because, they say, they were drunk before and only intended to sign provisionally. They tell Musgrave they aren't fully signing up until they've heard more, and they urge him to go on.

Musgrave says that he knows there are all kinds of stories about the army, but he's there to tell them the truth. He sends the Bargee out to get someone who's seen what that truth is. While the Bargee is gone, Musgrave explains that the army is work and demonstrates two tools of the job, the rifle and the Gatling gun, which he loads. He explains that the Gatling is so powerful and so fast that he could kill everyone in the marketplace in no time flat. He then goes on to explain that even though there are no wars to be fought with other countries, there are still battles to be fought. He refers to what the Pastor said about God's war.

The Bargee brings Walsh in, and they both watch as Hurst and Attercliffe join Musgrave. They talk about having to fight against invaders and against cruelty and about soldiers giving up their lives in the name of honesty. Musgrave, getting more and more carried away, shouts that he salutes one flag only and tells Attercliffe to raise it. Attercliffe pulls on one of the ropes and raises Hicks' skeleton, still dressed in his uniform, up from its box and into the air! Musgrave sings and dances about how the dead man sits on your back and never leaves. He sees the crowd trying to leave and shouts that he's a very good shot with the Gatling gun, so if they want to live they'd better stay.

The Mayor orders the Constable to grab Musgrave, but Musgrave says that if anybody moves against him they'll be shot. He then gives a long speech in which he explains that the bones are those of a soldier killed by anti-British subversives and that he and his men received orders to bring in the entire town for questioning in the hopes of

finding the killers. Attercliffe interjects that while he was bringing in the villagers, he accidentally killed a girl. Musgrave says that it didn't matter because she was a woman and had ties to the subversives. He orders Hurst to take a rifle and hold it on the crowd and then lists the numbers of people injured when they were being brought in, which are exactly the same numbers as the ones Musgrave quoted in his nightmare. He adds that five men died as a result of their injuries and concludes by saying that they never found Hicks' killers.

Musgrave asks Walsh for his opinion, and after interruptions by the Mayor and the Constable, Walsh says that his opinion isn't necessary, that the bones on the flagpole are all the proof anybody needs of what life as a soldier is all about. Musgrave tells him that he wants Walsh's opinion about those who killed the soldier. Walsh says that soldiers who go uninvited into other people's countries deserve what they get and tells Musgrave that he should take his men and leave the town in peace.

Act 3, Scene 1, Part 1 Analysis

This section of this scene contains the first part of the play's climactic confrontation between Musgrave and the people of the town. Musgrave's insanity, hinted at in earlier scenes, finally becomes completely apparent, reaching its high point in his elevating of Hicks' bones up the flagpole and his song and dance at Hicks' feet. Exactly what madness is leading Musgrave to is not yet clear but will become clear as the scene progresses.

What triggered Attercliffe's guilt and remorse is also revealed, the killing of the little girl. Because Musgrave is so obviously mad at this point, it seems reasonable to assume that Attercliffe's version of what happened is the accurate one. The girl who died had no connection to the subversives at all. Ironically, it's Attercliffe who, in the next scene, behaves with the true integrity that Musgrave seems convinced underlies his own actions.

Billy Hicks' bones are a powerful symbol of death and violence, and as such they are the clearest visual representation of the play's theme that violence triggers violence. This idea is further reinforced by the way that Musgrave, after raising the bones and showing the crowd the results of violence, is triggered to initiate more shocking acts of brutality.

Act 3, Scene 1, Part 2

Act 3, Scene 1, Part 2 Summary

Musgrave reveals that the bones belong to a native of the town, Billy Hicks. The colliers and Bargee refuse to believe it. Mrs. Hitchcock says that Annie has a right to know, and Musgrave lets Mrs. Hitchcock go to fetch Annie. He then says that he sees the hand of God in every human experience, explaining that Billy was killed because it had been "decided." He then says that Hicks' death made it clear that the subversives in the town were ready to kill soldiers, so more soldiers were brought in to keep the people in order. Because of that, more soldiers would be killed, which meant that more civilians would be killed, and the cycle would go on until someone saw it for what it was and acted to end it.

Walsh tries to get Musgrave to let the people of the town go home, but Musgrave refuses. He says that because five times as many people died to atone for the death of one, five times that many have to die to atone for those deaths. He announces that twenty-five people of the town have to die.

Attercliffe jumps up, but before he can do anything, Mrs. Hitchcock and Annie appear at a window. Annie pleads for Hicks' bones to be cut down, and the Bargee fetches a ladder so that she can climb down and do it herself. Musgrave stops him and asks for help in ending the cycle, which he refers to as God's Logic. He says his mission is to cure the madness of sending men off to war to kill and be killed, and he wants to start by killing the Mayor and Parson, who've urged the men of the town to sign up. Walsh urges Musgrave to end what he's doing, saying that the people of the town have their own fights to fight. Musgrave tries again to get them to see that they can be part of a cure, but then Attercliffe says there can be no cure. He stands away from his weapon. Hurst takes his place, and the Bargee says he's with Musgrave and asks where he wants to start. Meanwhile, the Slow Collier holds the ladder, and Annie comes down.

Musgrave urges Annie to tell the crowd the truth about how it feels to lose Billy, but Hurst loses his temper. He says they've got to keep talking to the crowd themselves otherwise they'll never accomplish what they came to do, and he reminds Musgrave that there are dragoons coming. He then shouts to the crowd, and the audience, that they've been driven mad by being sent to war and to kill. He blames authority figures like the Mayor and the Parson, who urge killing but never actually kill themselves, and he urges the crowd to rebel and make sure that no soldier is ever killed again.

The Colliers waver, saying that Hurst might be right. Annie steps forward, saying that what happened to Billy happened to Sparky, only the soldiers killed Sparky themselves. Walsh angrily turns to the Colliers and says if they're prepared to listen to men who'd kill one of their own, they can go ahead and do it. Hurst runs to the Gatling gun and gets ready to start shooting. Attercliffe stands in front of the gun, saying he won't let it happen. Hurst pushes him out of the way. Musgrave goes after Hurst, saying it isn't the

right way and implying that he needs the townspeople to volunteer. Hurst makes as if to run off and then is shot by an arriving dragoon, who tells Musgrave to put his hands up.

The Bargee calls for cheers from the crowd as the dragoon arrests Musgrave and Attercliffe. He then asks the Mayor whether any other assistance is needed. The Mayor says everything is fine, but Walsh bitterly comments that the town is right back where it started. The Bargee opens the keg of beer and starts pouring, singing a drinking song as he passes jugs to the men of the town. Meanwhile, Annie lowers the skeleton and sits with it in her lap. Mrs. Hitchcock withdraws from the window, and the townspeople led by the Bargee begin to dance. Musgrave and Attercliffe move to the front of the stage.

Act 3, Scene 1, Part 2 Analysis

Musgrave's logic in this scene is difficult to follow, but it has to be remembered that he's insane. Essentially what he's saying is that if the people of the town volunteer to be killed, the deaths caused by the soldiers will be redeemed. It's almost as though he's trying to avoid his own guilt and responsibility, a possibility made more likely by the contrasting actions of Attercliffe who has both taken responsibility for his actions and taken on the additional responsibility for keeping the townspeople's lives safe from Musgrave. Hurst is simply trigger-happy and might have done some serious damage had he not been shot by the arriving dragoons. His death is another way of dramatizing the play's previously discussed theme, that violence causes more violence.

Once again, at the end of this scene the Bargee mocks Musgrave and his idea of the Dance, this time by leading the townspeople in a beer-fueled dance of their own. The dance, in which even Walsh eventually participates, combines with Annie's embrace of her beloved's bones to represent the way that the true dance of life, God's true word, continues in all its flawed, human, occasional joy and frequent grief in spite of the efforts of insane leaders like Musgrave, who shape it to their own goals and desires. This idea is reinforced by Mrs. Hitchcock in the following scene.

Act 3, Scene 2

Act 3, Scene 2 Summary

Attercliffe and Musgrave are in prison. Attercliffe tries to get Musgrave to talk, saying that he wishes he'd never become a soldier. Musgrave remains silent. Mrs. Hitchcock comes with a mug of port, saying that she can only stay for a moment. Musgrave refuses the drink, and Mrs. Hitchcock gives it to Attercliffe. As Attercliffe drinks, Musgrave talks to himself about the logic of his plan, wondering how it could fail. Mrs. Hitchcock angrily explains that he got his logic wrong, saying that the town had gotten life right even though there were difficulties, but then Musgrave came in and tried to destroy that life by bringing in a different kind of war. Attercliffe comments that "you can't cure the pox by further whoring." Musgrave says that's not the truth, repeating over and over that God was with him. He mutters a disbelieving comment about how the Bargee and the dragoons were dancing, but Mrs. Hitchcock says that they won't be dancing for long, adding that they'll remember their real lives soon enough.

Attercliffe sings a song about how a soldier gave his girl a blood red rose, went to war and then came back to find that she'd found love with another. This love is represented in the song by the seed of the apple that her new love had given her, which would grow and strengthen and provide more love for others. When he's done, Attercliffe tells Musgrave that the two of them will be hung higher than most apple trees, and he wonders whether they'll be able to start an orchard.

Act 3, Scene 2 Analysis

Aside from the revelation that Musgrave and Attercliffe are to be executed for their crimes, three thematic elements are the important aspects of this scene. The first is Mrs. Hitchcock's comment to Musgrave about the town having gotten life right, which reiterates the previously discussed point about life being more truly lived before, and since, Musgrave's "dance." The second is found in Attercliffe's comment about the pox, actually a reference to syphilis. By saying that you don't stop the spread of STDs by having more sex with prostitutes, he's reinforcing the play's central theme about being unable to stop violence with more violence.

The third thematic element appears in Attercliffe's song. The rose, described as being the color of blood, represents violence, while the apple and its seeds represent the enduring power of love. The song is about love transcending violence, another way of expressing the point made by the visual image of Annie cradling Hicks' bones at the end of the previous scene. In singing it, Attercliffe shows he's the one soldier who is truly repentant of what he did and prepared to accept the consequences. He also seems to be ironically aware of the possibility that even though they failed, they may have still accomplished their goal. His comment about an orchard suggests that by illustrating

how violence can beget violence, he and Musgrave have actually made their point, but without killing anyone.

A very telling point is that throughout the scene Musgrave either remains silent or repeats that he was right. This indicates that he has learned nothing from what happened. Attercliffe clearly has, though. His journey carries the hopeful aspect of the play's theme, and Musgrave's carries the warning aspect.

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Characters

Annie

Annie is the barmaid who works in Mrs. Hitchcock's pub. She earned a bad reputation by becoming impregnated by Billy Hicks, a soldier who later died. Their baby died soon after birth.

She reinforces her bad reputation by flirting with the British soldiers. Initially Annie is attracted to Hurst, refusing Sparky's amorous advances. However, after being rebuffed by both Hurst and Attercliffe, she finds comfort with Sparky.

Only Annie understands Musgrave' s obsession with truth. It is she who reveals what really happened to Sparky.

Private Attercliffe

Attercliffe is one of the four soldiers who have deserted the English army to seek revenge for Billy Hicks. He is the peacemaker of the group. Attercliffe truly believes in Musgrave's cause, and follows his directives to the letter. He is also adamantly against killing anyone.

Yet he is the one who accidentally kills Sparky. This incident tears Attercliffe apart, and he wants Musgrave to change their plan. When Musgrave refuses, this marks a shift in their relationship.

During Musgrave's speech at the rally, Attercliffe tries to promote nonviolence and refuses to kill anyone. He prevents Hurst from killing them as well. At the end of the play, he is imprisoned with Musgrave. In many ways, Attercliffe is Musgrave's conscience.

The Bargee

The Bargee is the barge driver who transports the soldiers to the town. A merry fellow, he is always working an angle even to the point of selling out the soldiers to make a little money.

He does not seem to like soldiers, and generally regards Musgrave and his mission with contempt. The Bargee is only interested in attention or financial reward. It is he who sticks a gun in Musgrave's back as the dragoons enter the town; he wants credit for capturing them.

Joe Bludgeon

See The Bargee

The Constable

The Constable is the chief law enforcer in the town. He hopes to use the soldiers as reinforcements against the strikers.

Mrs, Hitchcock

Mrs. Hitchcock runs the pub where the soldiers stay. She is a large, good-natured woman who can defend herself effectively. Primarily, she is out to protect her own (primarily economic) interests. Yet she shows much kindness to Annie and the soldiers during the play.

Private Hurst

Hurst is one of Musgrave's soldiers. He is a murderer, having killed an officer with good reason. Impatient and tense, he can be mean and spends much of his time brooding. Yet Annie believes Hurst is the most handsome of the soldiers, and offers to spend the night with him. He ultimately rejects her.

Though Hurst follows most of Musgrave's orders, he is full of doubt about their mission. He threatens to kill Sparky when Hurst finds out that he was going to leave. At the climax of the play, Hurst rejects some of Musgrave's ideas and is ready to kill the townspeople. He is killed when the dragoons shoot him.

The Mayor

The Mayor runs the small town: in addition to being its highest officer, he also owns the coal mines. He is despised by most of the townspeople. Throughout the play, the Mayor tries to use the soldiers' presence to his own advantage.

Serjeant Musgrave

Also known by the nickname Black Jack, Musgrave is the protagonist of the play. He is the leader of the group of four soldiers; it is his plan they are implementing.

His true intentions are unclear for most of the play. Like the other soldiers, he has deserted the army while stationed in a foreign land. Several incidents prompted the desertion, particularly the death of Billy Hicks and the killing of some civilians. To fund his plan, Musgrave stole money from the army.

Musgrave wants to communicate the negative aspects of army life, especially the corruption and how it wastes lives. He wants to avenge the deaths that haunt his consciousness. Yet no one realizes how mentally ill he is until he reveals his true plan: killing twenty-five townspeople. He ends up in prison, worrying that his message will be forgotten.

The Parson

The Parson is the supposed moral center of the town. He is clearly on the side of the Mayor, and does not have much sympathy for the colliers and their plight. When the soldiers arrive, he is most concerned that they do not act drunk and disorderly.

Private Sparky

Sparky is the youngest and most volatile of the soldiers. He seems to have known Hicks the best.

At the recruiting party, he gets drunk and tries to get together with Annie. Sparky becomes jealous when she picks Hurst. Though he does not win her over immediately, he is the only soldier who shows her real kindness in the barn. With Annie, Sparky decides to leave.

For his disloyalty to the plan he is killed by Attercliffe and Hurst. Annie uses his senseless death as a symbol of truth during the play's climax.

Walsh

A leader among the colliers, Walsh is suspicious of Musgrave's true intentions. His paramount concerns are with the labor problems in the town.

Themes

Guilt

Guilt and remorse underscore much of *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*. Musgrave is overcome by guilt over the death of Billy Hicks as well as the five civilians who were killed in retaliation. Two of his fellow deserters, Attercliffe and Sparky, also knew Hicks and share these feelings. In part, guilt prompted them to desert their posts in order to travel to this coal-mining town.

Musgrave wants to force England to share responsibilities for these deaths. To that end, he makes a public display of Hicks's skeleton, showing the townspeople how one of their sons died in vain. Musgrave also plans to shoot twenty-five of the town's leading citizens, but his dastardly scheme is fortunately stopped.

Ghosts

The ghost of Billy Hicks haunts many of the characters of *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance.* Musgrave and two of the three soldiers, Attercliffe and Sparky, have deserted their regular posts in order to do something so that Hicks's death was not in vain.

The soldiers assume that the rally will be a peaceful display of Hicks's skeleton and an explanation of the horrors of army life but Musgrave has other ideas. He wants to kill in order to exorcise Hicks's ghost from his head and drive his point home in a very dramatic fashion.

In a way, Hicks' s ghost represents the futility of war for Musgrave and his men. At the end of the play, the ghost still haunts Musgrave and Attercliffe.

Hicks's ghost also haunts Annie. He was her lover and the father of her baby. After Hicks left town to join the army and the baby died, Annie was left alone and rejected as an outcast. Unlike the soldiers, Annie gets a chance to excise Hicks' ghost during the rally at the end of the play. She uses his death to tell the truth about Sparky's untimely demise at the hands of Attercliffe. This gives her the strength and insight to reveal questionable aspects of Musgrave's beliefs.

Hurst is being haunted by another ghost not that of Billy Hicks. Hurst deserted the army because he was accused of killing an officer. In an attempt to escape his fate he runs away with Musgrave, only to be killed by the dragoons late in the play.

Loyalty

Serjeant Musgrave demands absolute loyalty from his fellow soldiers. He is their leader and believes that he has God on his side. Although Musgrave has deserted the British

Army, he still adheres to some of its values. While he believes that unnecessary killing is wrong and that troops often live and work in abysmal conditions, Musgrave is not above callousness to his own men.

For example, after Sparky is accidentally killed by Attercliffe, the Serjeant writes off his death as "immaterial" when he learns that Sparky was going to desert them.

Similarly, Musgrave expects Attercliffe to help kill twenty-five civilians, despite the fact that he knows Attercliffe is totally opposed to killing.

All the soldiers remain loyal to Musgrave through much of the play although they all question his values at some point. Sparky dies the moment he considers disloyalty. Hurst dies taking loyalty to an extreme by preparing to kill innocent civilians.

One of the moral lessons of Serjeant Musgrave's Dance is that loyalty can be abused and should have its limits.

Style

Setting

Serjeant Musgrave's Dance is a realistic drama set in the north of England in 1880. Much of the action takes place in a public house (pub) in a small mining town torn apart because of a miner's strike.

There are also a few outdoor settings, such as the churchyard and the town's marketplace.

The settings add to the realism of the play. Both the pub and the marketplace are places where different kinds of people come together, from town officials to common colliers. The other settings emphasize the cold harshness of life in the northern town.

Songs, Verse and Dance

Arden utilizes various dramatic techniques to emphasize the time and place of the action as well as develop characters. The most prominent of these are songs, poetic verse, and dances.

Many of the main characters sing folk-type songs and recite verse. Sparky sings many times, commenting on the action and revealing much about himself and his attitude towards life. Mrs. Hitchcock, Annie, and the Bargee also sing, while Walsh, other colliers, and Attercliffe (especially at the very end of the play) chime in with enlightening verse. The Bargee is always whistling the song "Michael Finnegan."

During the recruiting party, everyone but Musgrave sings and dances. Two of the colliers do a clog dance while the Bargee and others provide the music. This creates a festive atmosphere that belies the true meaning for the soldiers' visit, and gives a sense of the culture of Northern England.

Musgrave lets loose only in the play's climax, in which he both sings and as the title of the play indicates dances. His furious words and movements are a release from his tight-lipped presence throughout the play. The song and dance allow him to express the true meaning of his appearance in town: to display the skeleton of Billy Hicks, avenge Hicks's death, and educate the townspeople about the horrors of war.

Audience Participation

In the climactic scene of *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, the audience becomes part of the drama. In the marketplace, a small crowd gathers to hear the speeches. Yet because there is no crowd of townspeople beyond the handful of characters, everything is

addressed to the audience. It is as if Arden is making his argument directly to the audience.

The Bargee is especially important in this scene. He is the link between the audience and the action on stage. The directions call for him to "create crowd-reactions." When Musgrave and his men pull out their rifles and Galling gun, they aim them at the audience, emphasizing that this message is addressed directly to them the townspeople of the world.

Historical Context

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, British society was in transition. Yet one consistent factor was the dominance of the Conservative Party. From 1951-1964 they would remain in power.

The British economy had greatly recovered from World War II. Overall, British citizens were more prosperous and affluent. Average earnings increased. While unemployment declined on the whole, it increased at the beginning and again at the end of 1959.

Labor issues came to the forefront during this period of British history. In June 1959, for example, there was a major printing strike involving 100,000 workers in London and the provinces. As a result, most provincial presses did not operate for much of the summer.

There had been a trend towards nationalization of major industries, like printing, that had begun in the immediate postwar period. This continued, though most of these industries lost money at the end of the 1950s.

Great Britain declined to join the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1957, but soon regretted the decision. They joined a rival economic group, the European Free Trade Association, in 1960, and lobbied to join the EEC in the mid-1960s.

Foreign affairs were very important in this time period. Britain had been a colonial power in the nineteenth century, but by the middle of the twentieth century, their influence was waning. Several British colonies and protectorates were seeking independence to some extent.

One historical incident inspired Arden to write *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*. Great Britain had controlled the island of Cyprus for many years, but both Greek and Turkish Cypriots wanted to rule the island by the late 1950s. In 1958, a Greek Cypriot, intent on overthrowing the British, killed the wife of a British Army sergeant.

As a result, locals were rounded up and three Cypriots were killed. Two years later, Great Britain conceded control of much of the island to the Greek Cypriot majority.

There were also significant disturbances in Malta and Nyasaland in 1959.

British colonial holdings directly affected life in the home country. There was significant immigration to England. Immigration would have a great impact on Great Britain for the rest of the twentieth century.

Critical Overview

From its first production, *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* has been controversial. Reviewers of the initial British productions found flaws with the play's structure. Hilary Spurling of the *Spectator* contended: "There is no conflict. I defy anyone to explain the plot, except perhaps as a series of expedients to stave off the grand climax until the last act..."

Only a few critics favorably assessed Arden's play. Alan Brien asserted that "I have never seen a play which created its own mad, obsessed, other-world so completely as *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance."*

American critics offered mixed reviews of the drama. Stanley Kauffmann of The *New York Times* maintained, "*Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* ... has been hailed as the best postwar English play and has been derogated as murky. To me, there seems to be good argument on both sides."

An anonymous critic in *Newsweek* asserted: "There is no single 'point' to *Musgrave*. Read by some as a muddled pacifist tract and by others as an equally muddled anti-imperialist one, its real dramatic vision is that of the horror of single-mindness, of ends determining means and even more crucially of abstraction in moral life."

Only a few American commentators praised Arden's work, such as Henry Hewes of The *Saturday Review.* He found "*Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* ... a deeply evocative and earth-rich dramatic experience."

Most critics took the tone of Harold Clurman. He claimed: "One cannot see *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* ... without realizing that one is in the presence of a real dramatist, a man of passion and power. A cross-grained poetry emerges from his work. Yet one is not wholly satisfied..."

Many American critics delineated the many problems they found in Arden's text. Kauffmann composed a list: "Control of the central image is dissipated; tensions slacken; the theme is unclear and unresolved, even somewhat arbitrarily tied up."

Along similar lines, Edith Oliver of The *New Yorker* maintained: "Mr. Arden' s writing is not the clearest on earth, and he certainly is a relentless man with an obvious point, hammering away long after it has reached home. Sifting out his subsidiary ideas and the twists of his plot from all the clatter and clutter becomes a problem."

Thematic concerns were the focus of several reviews. The anonymous *Time* critic asserted: "He tries to practice consensus drama, a contradiction in terms. For *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* to possess any intrinsic vitality, there would have to be a respectable body of thought holding that war is heavenly. As it is, Arden is merely preaching to the converted..."

Oliver also considered Serjeant Musgrave's Dance's, lack of vitality. She contended: "For all the noise and movement, the play has little real vitality, being neither moving nor stirring. Underneath its jumpy surface, Serjeant Musgrave's Dance seems to me ... conventional, sentimental, and, what is worse, condescending to its own characters, most of whom are of the working class and could have been assembled from old Punch cartoons."

Between the 1960s and 1980s, Arden and his play were closely scrutinized by scholars. He came to be viewed as an icon in British theater, as Serjeant Musgrave's Dance was interpreted and studied from every angle.

By the time the play was revived in Great Britain in 1984, Serjeant Musgrave's Dance was an integral part of England's theater history. Many reviews acknowledged its iconic status. As Michael Billington of the Manchester Guardian Weekly asserted, "But, when all one's reservations have been registered, the blunt fact is that Arden's work is one of the best post-war political plays and deserves to be seen as well as studied."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
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Critical Essay #1

In this essay, Petrusso contends that though most critics and scholars maintain that Serjeant Musgrave's Dance promotes pacifism, the play is actually a pro-war and pro-army drama.

Although Serjeant Musgrave's Dance has been extremely controversial from its first production in 1959, most critics and scholars agree that the play is pacifist in nature. That is, they believe the play depicts armed conflict and army life in very negative, futile terms.

Yet to accomplish this, Arden explores both the positive and negative aspects of military life. Many critics point to this duality as a hallmark of Arden's developing style though they also claim that it bogs down the play's true meaning.

However, I contend that Arden implicitly supports violence, the army, and war throughout the play. Pacifism loses in Musgrave, and while the audience could walk away believing that pacifism should triumph, Arden does not do much to give hope that it will. Indeed, he seems to be illustrating that the military is important and that there is a point to fighting.

In this essay, I explore the elements of the play that could be defined as pacifist; counter these points with examples of Arden's pro-violence message; and finally, provide a new perspective on the end of the play.

Many critics maintain that Serjeant Musgrave's Dance promotes pacifism. They believe that Musgrave has led the soldiers to this coal-mining town in order to show the citizens how war has negatively impacted one of their own citizens Billy Hicks.

Billy Hicks was a soldier who died unnecessarily while serving in the army. His death in an unnamed British colony inspired controversy and anger against the civilians in the area. To avenge Hicks' death, some locals were rounded up and five were killed, including a young girl.

Hicks served with Musgrave, Sparky, and Attercliffe. Shocked at their friend's death and the army's response to it, these soldiers deserted their posts, picked up Hurst (who had killed an officer under circumstances Musgrave could rationalize), and traveled to Hicks's hometown to settle the score.

The soldiers have different reactions to the violence of military life: Attercliffe does not want to kill anyone; Sparky tries to desert the deserters; and Hurst is ready to kill at an instant.

Yet Musgrave is the most seriously affected of the four men. Believing that he is on some sort of mission from God to avenge the deaths, he plans to kill twenty-five prominent citizens of the town (five times the number of civilians killed) as retribution.

He is stopped before he can go through with it, but all these components are perceived to underscore the idea that the play is pacifist.

Another pacifist aspect of Serjeant Musgrave's Dance is the character of Annie. The barmaid in Mrs. Hitchcock's pub, Annie was Hicks's lover. In fact, she was pregnant with his child, but he left for the army before the child's birth. When the baby was born, it was deformed and sickly. The child died before it was two months old, around the same time Hicks was killed.

So Annie is a victim of the violence of war. An outcast because of her bad reputation and her out-of-wedlock child, Annie is taken in by Mrs. Hitchcock.

At the climax of the play, Annie takes possession of Hicks's skeleton. When Musgrave tries to write off Sparky's murder (after Hurst discovers that Sparky intends to leave, Hurst threatens to kill Sparky, though Attercliffe accidentally does the deed) as "barely materi[al]" to his antiwar and anti-army message, Annie relates the truth about Sparky's death. To Annie, Sparky's death is just as important in terms of revealing the truth about the army, violence, and soldiers.

Despite the power of these pacifist elements of Serjeant Musgrave's Dance, Arden subversively champions violence, war, and the military. Violence is an inherent part of all the lives depicted in the play. There were violent tensions even before the arrival of the soldiers, which depicts violence as a way of life.

The town officials fear violence from the colliers, and rightfully so. These workers are on strike or have been locked out of their workplace, and are quite angry about how they have been treated. Violence is one of the only ways they can express themselves.

At first, the colliers also hate the soldiers, believing they represent the same kind of authority as management. The colliers resort to violence to intimidate the authorities. They throw stones at soldiers and the Constable's office. They try to steal the Galling gun (a precursor to the machine gun). Colliers also physically attack the Constable when he tries to close the bar.

The climax of the play the recruiting rally occurs as town officials hope to prevent violence by the colliers. Musgrave has other plans; they involve the murder of twenty-five relatively innocent people. More violence seems to be his answer for everything. This is hardly pacifist.

As depicted in the play, army life has many positive points. Though Hicks lost his life and Musgrave is arguably insane, neither is necessarily a direct result of the army. Mrs. Hitchcock describes Hicks as this: "Not what you'd call a bad young feller, you know but he weren't no good either." Who is to say he would not have had problems if he had stayed at home perhaps he would have died in a colliers' strike.

In the military, Musgrave gained discipline, organizational skills, and a moral compass. He learned how to be in charge of men and have them execute his plan. Throughout the play, Musgrave uses the army and its methods to prove his point, though he ultimately

fails. Yet that is because of his deficiency of character. Without the army, Musgrave would not be the same man.

The army represents authority and order. The colliers hate the soldiers because they believe that they have been called by management to break the strike. While this is not true, the town's officials believe that the soldiers have come to recruit new soldiers. To that end, they try to identify troublemakers for the soldiers to recruit.

While this would directly benefit management, it might also be good for the colliers as well. There would be less competition for jobs, and the soldiers who join up would have the opportunity to become authority figures themselves. They will get the chance to learn important life skills that will only help them when they return. The colliers even allow themselves to be led in a drunken drill by the Bargee in an attempt to put themselves in authority's shoes.

Arden implies that wars are continuous, though not always with men in bright uniforms or on foreign soil. Every time there is an economic crisis in the coal industry, there will probably be a war between management and colliers. There can be no pacifists in this war, because both sides have too much to lose. Musgrave believes that all wars are the same but they are not. The rally at the marketplace utterly fails to prove their point.

The climax of the play is the pinnacle of Arden's anti-pacifism: Musgrave displays Hicks's skeleton, provides the circumstances of his death, describes the harsh life of a soldier, and then prepares to take his revenge. He asserts that he wants to end war, but his methods work in an opposite manner. He plans to take twenty-five innocent lives as revenge for Hicks' death, hoping to drive his message home.

Yet if the townspeople are threatened, there is no reason why they would listen to this pacifist message. If Musgrave and Hurst had begun firing, many of those gathered would have fought them. Defending one's self is not particularly pacifist. Musgrave tries to draw a parallel between his war against war and the colliers' struggle against management, but they see through it. The kind of wars Musgrave is talking about cannot compare to their daily fight to survive.

At the conclusion of the play, the authorities restore order: the dragoons arrive, killing Hurst and arresting Attercliffe and Musgrave. After the arrests, the Mayor does not use the dragoons on the colliers, at least right away. He tells an officer, "Well, I'd say it was about all over now, young man wouldn't you?"

Musgrave and Attercliffe are imprisoned. Mrs. Hitchcock tries to give Musgrave hope that their message will be remembered but there is nothing to hope for anymore. It seems that pacifism does not get one very far.

Source: A. *Petrusso, for Drama for Students, Gale, 2000.*

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Forsas-Scott examines the conflict between the plot structure of the play and Musgrave's message.

Serjeant Musgrave's Dance is probably John Arden' s best-known play. It is also a play which has generated much critical argument, the focal point tending to be Black Jack Musgrave himself. Frequently, however, the Serjeant has been interpreted in conventional naturalistic terms, the reasons for his failure being traced to his outlook, his personality, and his mind. When John Russell Taylor asserted, in Anger and After, that "this is a play about individual, complicated human beings,..." he defined a view of Serjeant Musgrave's Dance which has continued to play an important part in the critical discussion.

The most notable divergent approach to the play and indeed to Arden's play-writing as a whole is that which has been advocated by Albert Hunt. Hunt sees Arden's work as belonging, not to the naturalistic theatre of illusion, but to a broader and more ancient tradition which he exemplifies with theatre as different as British pantomime and the dramas of Shakespeare and Brecht. The theatre of illusion, Hunt argues, is "a theatre of persuasion"; the tradition to which Arden's plays belong, in contrast, "has precisely the opposite aim: to question appearances." Consequently, Serjeant Musgrave's Dance , if "Played for identification with the audience, ... becomes incomprehensible. For the true statement of the play lies in the way Musgrave's pacifist message is judged against the action of the play and found inadequate. If you're too close to Musgrave, this judgement is never seen."

Hunt's view of Arden's drama is, I believe, essentially correct. In this essay, I want to investigate more closely what Hunt calls "the action of the play" and demonstrate how Arden uses a given plot structure as a means of making a statement in artistic terms. As Hunt indicates, the central conflict is between this plot structure and Musgrave's message, but Musgrave's particular brand of pacifism is compounded of elements which have a special historical significance with regard to drama as well as politics. It seems to me that only when these dimensions become clear to us, can the full implications of the play's confrontation begin to emerge.

In an illuminating essay on Macbeth, Glynne Wickham has shown that the structure of Shakespeare's tragedy can be seen as a combination of two famous sequences from the medieval Cycle Plays: the story of Herod the Great and the Harrowing of Hell. According to Wickham, "The essentials that [Shakespeare] ... drew from the [Herod] play are the poisoning of a tyrant's peace of mind by the prophecy of a rival destined to eclipse him, the attempt to forestall that prophecy by the hiring of assassins to murder all potential rivals and the final overthrow and damnation of the tyrant." With Macbeth as a Scottish Herod, his eventual damnation foreshadowed by frequent references to him as the Devil, Macduff, his chief protagonist, plays the role of Christ. "As Christ harrowed Hell and released Adam from Satan's dominion," Wickham explains, "so afflicted

subjects of mortal tyranny will find a champion who will release them from fear and bondage. This Macduff does for Scotland. ..."

Wickham begins his analysis with a detailed examination of the familiar Porter scene, often so strangely out of place to a modern audience, but to the Elizabethan theatre-goer, a well-nigh unmistakable reference to the Harrowing of Hell. Like Shakespeare, Arden draws on a popular dramatic tradition for the plot of *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* and brings this tradition sharply into focus at a crucial point in the dramatic action. The type of popular drama which Arden uses has survived into the present time, and in Act III, Scene I of Serjeant Musgrave 's Dance it surfaces with full force and all of its customary paraphernalia, the significant details being underlined by the Bargee who sets the scene in the market-place:

Here they are on a winter's morning, you've got six kids at home crying out for bread, you've got a sour cold wife and no fire and no breakfast: and you're too damn miserable even to fight if there's owt else at all to take your mind off it so here you are, you lucky people, in your own old market-place, a real live lovely circus, with real live golden sovereigns in somebody's pocket and real live taddy ale to be doled out to the bunch of you!

This is the setting for a Mummers' Play. Mary B. O'Connell, in an article published in Modern Drama in 1971, has pointed to certain parallels between *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* and the Mummers' Play, more especially the type known as the Wooing Ceremony or the Plough Play. In O'Connell's opinion, the Plough Play has served Arden "as his model for characterization and plot development," and she has convincingly identified several of the characters in *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* with their prototypes in the ancient folk-play. But with regard to the plot, it seems to me that Arden's consistent use of the Wooing Ceremony as the basis of the dramatic action in *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* invites us to make rather more far-reaching comparisons than the ones presented by O'Connell. Once this has been done, it also becomes apparent that Arden has taken the liberty of giving the Mummers' Play a personal but highly significant twist which I believe to be central to the overall message of the play. O'Connell has concluded that Arden, in dealing with "the problems of our contemporary world," has "attempted to use a ritual pattern which helped previous generations to cope with their particular world structures." To my mind, however, Arden's employment of this ritual pattern aims far beyond the passive concept of coping; ultimately, it charges the action of *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* with revolutionary dynamism. Let us take a closer look, therefore, first at the Wooing Ceremony and then at its application in Arden's play.

There is no definitive version of the Wooing Ceremony, just as there is no standard Sword Play or Hero Combat; what we have is simply a number of individual plays which, although they often vary considerably, can be recognized as constituting a distinctive group. To illustrate my argument here, I have chosen the well-known Wooing Ceremony called the Bassingham Play, reproduced by Chambers in *The English Folk-Play* and used by Brody in *The English Mummers and their Plays* to exemplify the Wooing Ceremony as a type. In the Bassingham Play, the action consists of a Prologue; a threefold wooing of the Lady; the appearance of Old Dame Jane, who brings a baby

allegedly fathered by the Fool; a continuation of the wooing action; a fight between St. George and the Fool, in which the Fool falls; the revival of the Fool by the Doctor; and the Lady's acceptance of the Fool. In the so-called Children's version of the Bassingham Play, the action concludes with the Fool's invitation to the wedding. Significantly, a number of Wooing Ceremonies involve a Recruiting Sergeant as a principal figure. These plays follow a pattern similar to the one outlined above, but they also include the Lady's repeated rejection of a young recruit, and frequently the Sergeant himself proceeds to woo the Lady.

O'Connell has identified Sparky as the Fool and the Bargee as the Devil in Arden's play, and she has also pointed to the significance of Annie and Mrs. Hitchcock, Arden's equivalents of the Lady who woos the Fool and the Old Woman connected with the bastard child. To this list we can then add the Recruiting Sergeant, who dances and sings, moreover, just as Musgrave does in the marketplace. Further, numerous details in Arden's drama reinforce the parallels with the Mummers' Play. Like true mummers, the soldiers are visitors to the community. Their all-important anonymity, traditionally achieved by means of disguise, has been expanded into the circumstantial disguise provided by the confusion surrounding the soldiers' mission. Their peace mission can be seen, in fact, as a modern reflection of the very function of the Mummers' Play, making explicit its concern with overcoming death and destruction for the sake of ensuring the continuation of life. The soldiers' role as mummers is further underlined by the Mayor's questions on first meeting Musgrave: "How do you propose to work?" he asks, "... I mean, d'you tramp around the streets drumming, or set on your fannies in a pub or what?" The image of the men tramping around the streets drumming clearly conjures up the Mummers' Play. *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* also contains direct verbal echoes of the Mummers' Play; perhaps the most striking is the Bargee's irreverent stanza about the Constable:

Constable Constable alive or dead, His head is of leather and his belly's of lead.

Chambers quotes a range of similar lines which are part of the dispute preceding the fight between the two combatants, and he also demonstrates, most convincingly, that the reference originally was to a dragon. With the Constable being a feeble and helpless man, the implicit comparison would seem to add to the disrespectful irony of the Bargee's words, but it can also be taken as a more direct indication of the true power which the Constable is ultimately seen to represent.

Having thus noted that Arden's play has obvious similarities with the Mummers' Play in general and the Wooing Ceremony in particular, we shall turn to the application of this traditional pattern in *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*. To begin with, the Mummers' Play customarily ends with a collection of money among the spectators. In *Serjeant Musgrave 's Dance*, however, the pattern is inverted. Virtually as soon as the soldiers have arrived, they are offered money, and not by the community at large, but by the Mayor, who uses bribery as a means of assisting Musgrave in what he takes to be a recruiting campaign. The soldiers are thus to be rewarded, not for ensuring the fertility and prosperity of the community, but for taking away as many of its young and able men as they can to the death and destruction of war.

This inversion of the traditional pattern is not a unique occurrence, but a consistent feature which assumes a profound significance in Arden's play. Thus, for example, we would normally expect the Recruiting Sergeant to woo the Lady himself. But clearly the man who treats Annie to a long speech about the dangers of interfering with the soldiers in his charge would never even contemplate behaving in accordance with the traditional pattern:

Look, lassie, anarchy: now, we're soldiers. Our work isn' t easy, no and it's not soft: it's got a strong name duty. And it's drawn out straight and black for us, a clear plan. But if you come to us with what you call your life or love *I'd* call it your indulgence and you scribble all over that plan, you make it crooked, dirty, idle, untidy, bad there's anarchy. I'm a religious man. I know words, and I know deeds, and I know how to be strong. So do these men. You will not stand between them and their strength! Go on now: take yourself off.

Obviously, this emphatic effort to ward off the threat posed by women undermines the very strength which Musgrave is claiming for the soldiers. But even more important is the fact that here the Serjeant, quite deliberately and explicitly, separates his men and himself from the Lady. This amounts to a violation of the pattern of the Wooing Ceremony and, indeed, of the Mummers' Play as a whole. For with the Mummers' Play being a fertility ritual, the role of the women is crucial. When Musgrave attempts to banish Annie to the very fringe of the dramatic action, the traditional pattern is quite blatantly inverted.

At the centre of the action in the Mummers' Play is a symbolic killing followed by a revival. And just as in the Wooing Ceremony, the Fool in *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* is killed: Sparky dies as the result of a fight. The quarrel begins in truly farcical style as a battle over a pair of trousers, and the killing occurs quite inadvertently with Attercliffe, the pacifist, happening to hold the bayonet which pierces Sparky's body. A central sequence of the ritual is thus presented as taking place by mistake, an impression which is reinforced by Musgrave's reaction: "Desertion. Fornication. It's not material. He's dead. Hide him away."

Sparky has a double in his friend Billy Hicks, killed overseas and brought back by the soldiers to his home town, where they eventually display his skeleton as their own crude means of communicating the futility of their trade. The skeleton in its box throws an ever-present shadow over Sparky's life, pointing ahead to the death of the Fool. The parallel is emphasized by the fact that both men die as a consequence of their profession, Sparky actually provoking the fatal quarrel with his decision to desert. And the deaths of these Army men are final. Billy Hicks is carried around as a skeleton, the very emblem of Death; and Sparky, in sharp contrast to the pattern of the Mummers' Play, cannot be brought back to life. The Doctor, indispensable in the Mummers' Play as the figure who revives the dead, simply does not exist in *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*.

As a result, the Mummers' Play for which the Bargee sets the scene in the market-place can never be performed. This section of *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance,* so often criticized, is a deliberate hiatus. The situation of the community and the arrangements in the

market-place add up to a perfect setting for a Mummers' Play, but on closer inspection, several of the central figures are missing. The Fool lies buried in Mrs. Hitchcock's midden, the Lady has been locked away, and the bastard child whom the Old Woman ought to bring is dead too, for Annie's baby with Billy "came a kind of bad shape, pale, sick: it wor dead and in the ground in no more nor two month." And with no Doctor to revive the dead, there can be no invitation to the wedding as the action draws to a close; all we get is a pathetic reminder of the events that ought to have occurred as we watch Annie cradling Billy's skeleton.

The scene which opens with promises of the ancient ritual degenerates into a confused sequence of speeches, preaching, and demonstrations of weapons, eventually disintegrating into arguments and chaos. This is the great opportunity to convey his message for which Musgrave has been waiting blind to the fact that in the meantime the ritual which is an inherent refutation of death and a celebration of life has been enacted around him. For the first two acts of *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* contain the traditional Wooing Ceremony, albeit in a stunted form. Sparky's magnificent entry into Mrs. Hitchcock's pub announces the beginning of a performance; Billy Hicks is the play's equivalent of the young man who has enlisted after making advances to the Lady; and the story of the bastard child is told by Mrs. Hitchcock. There is a threefold wooing, with the Fool being the final and successful suitor, and as in the Wooing Ceremony, the Fool is killed after an exchange of challenges. But here the similarities end, the scene in the market-place confirming the collapse of the ritual.

The reasons for this collapse are brought into focus by the inversions of the traditional pattern. The Mayor, who bribes Musgrave with golden sovereigns, is using the recruiting party to solve his own problems. His coal-mine is at a standstill, layoffs and wage-cuts having provoked a strike, and the simplest solution, in the words of the Mayor, is to "clear out half the population, stir up a diversion, turn their minds to summat else. The Queen's got wars, she's got rebellions. Over the sea.... Get rid o' the trouble-makers." It has been pointed out that the wintry weather in *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* is of a piece with the traditional setting for a Mummers' Play, but clearly the real strangle-hold on this community is that which is exerted not by the winter, but by the Mayor, as Mrs. Hitchcock stresses poignantly in her stanza about him:

I am a proud coalowner

And in scarlet here I stand.

Who shall come or who shall go

Through all my coal-black land?

Being a fertility ritual, the Mummers' Play revolves around the community's fundamental relationship with the powers of nature. In *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, by contrast, the pattern of the Mummers' Play throws into relief the deep divisions within the community and the consequent shift of focus on to man's relationship with his powerful fellow men. The livelihood of the community in Arden's play depends not on "the eternal pattern of

the seasons," but on the actions of the Mayor and owner of the colliery who inevitably has his own interests at heart.

The arrival of Musgrave and his men does not merely confirm these divisions within the community: it contributes to making them wider still. The Serjeant is instrumental in achieving this greater divisiveness, his most conspicuous measure being his banishment of Annie. Musgrave's treatment of the Lady in the Mummers' Play adds up to a deliberate suppression of the ancient fertility ritual with its inherent power of revitalizing the community. Instead, this community is left entirely in the hands of men. Their rule, Arden emphasizes, can be only sterile, divisive, and destructive.

Musgrave's impact on the course of the Mummers' Play is not the result of mere personal eccentricity. The inclusion of the Recruiting Sergeant in the Wooing Ceremony in the first place is a good illustration of that capacity for adaptation and expansion which has been one of the conditions for the survival of the Mummers' Play into the present century, and Arden has shrewdly exploited this capacity by turning his Recruiting Sergeant into a member of Cromwell's New Model Army. In an apparently casual remark in the Introduction to the play, Arden himself has hinted at this significance of his Serjeant: "he could well have served under Cromwell" is his concluding comment on Musgrave. It seems to me that the hint is worth taking seriously; indeed, I believe that the Cromwellian dimension is fundamental to the interpretation of Arden's Serjeant. Thus, Musgrave's strictness and rigidity, his preoccupation with discipline and duty, and last but not least, his religious fanaticism, are all of a piece with the image of the Cromwellian soldier. The Serjeant, who reads his pocket Bible in the pub, chewing his supper of dry bread and cheese after having declined the offer of a drink and annoyed the landlady into the bargain is an unmistakable Puritan. The point is made again, in terms which are equally immediate, when Musgrave wakes up the house with his nightmares: like so many seventeenth-century Puritans, he is convinced that the end of the world is imminent. And what might be taken for personal hesitation and uncertainty at a critical juncture in the market-place, just before the appearance of Annie, is more properly a reflection of the Puritan soldier's habit of waiting for the guidance of God, the suspended dramatic illustration of the words with which Musgrave has concluded his prayer in the churchyard: "... I know it is Your Logic, and You will provide-"

To Arden, the combination of a Puritan and an ancient dramatic tradition such as that of the Mummers' Play has profound significance. In a letter published in Encore in 1959, Arden refers to the fact that the Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre could appeal to virtually the entire range of social classes as a result of "the still extraordinarily powerful popular tradition which informed that Theatre as a whole." After a brief sketch of this tradition, with references to medieval Moralities and Buffooneries as well as Mummers' Plays, he continues: "The true tradition is still with us, but it is buried deep down under several hundred years of puritanical falsification...." Arden's ideal is theatre as the central concern of the community; yet during much of his career as a playwright, he has been attempting to convey this ideal through the conventional modern theatre, geared towards providing what he would regard as no more than entertainment for a mere section of the community. His solution has been to adopt, theatrically and dramatically,

the style of the old popular tradition, and to demonstrate, on the stage, how this tradition is being quenched by a new order which turns the theatre into a place for speech-making and sermonizing. Again and again this confrontation is enacted in Arden's drama, one of the most elaborate examples being the forcible removal of the drunken Butterthwaite from the respectable art gallery, formerly the notorious Copacabana Club, in The Workhouse Donkey. In Serjeant Musgrave 's Dance, when the Galling gun with its capacity of three-hundred-and-fifty rounds a minute is trained on to the spectators in the auditorium who are doubling, significantly, as the crowd in Arden's market-place the true role of this modern theatre is revealed: it is, by Arden's standards, essentially a tool of oppression.

The fate of the Fool in Serjeant Musgrave's Dance illustrates the joint consequences of all that for which the Serjeant and the local magistrates stand. Sparky may belong to a group of deserters who have chosen to turn their original role on its head by spreading the gospel of pacifism, but he still dies for the sake of the Army not, as would befit the Fool in the Mummers' Play, for the sake of the community. And the Army, the cause of this sterile and meaningless death, is the very embodiment of Musgrave's ideas. The Queen's Book, he explains, "which eighteen years I've lived, it's turned inside out for me," but this reversal alters little: the Serjeant's strategy for his peace mission is in true military style, the intended climax being the crudely primitive and only too familiar measure of largescale retaliation. Arden is saying that the Army, by definition, breeds nothing but violence and death. The same point is made in contrasting, deliberately farcical terms in the scene where the Bargee drills the drunken colliers. What starts as a comic send-up of the stern Serjeant and his men ends as a condensed and almost over-explicit illustration of what Arden regards as the inevitable consequences of the presence of an army: the Bargee's mock soldiers pick a quarrel among themselves and start fighting each other.

The Army is the basis of the power of the local magistrates. Musgrave and his men may be rebellious deserters, but nevertheless it is Army men who finally return the community to law and order. In terms of the life of the community, the wheel is brought full circle, as one of the colliers emphasizes in his summary: "The community's been saved. Peace and prosperity rules. We're all friends and neighbours for the rest of today. We're all sorted out. We're back where we were." But clearly this is not peace and prosperity of the kind that the Mummers' Play would promote: it is peace and prosperity dependent on rule through the barrel of a gun. As the officer in charge of the dragoons points out significantly, his troopers are at the Mayor's disposal; and Arden has stressed that if he were able to produce the play in a large theatre employing an enormous cast of supernumeraries, "the stage would be full of dragoons and the dance would take place in front of them. Then the impression given would be that even the most sympathetic of the colliers, who nearly sides with Musgrave, has no alternative but to take part in the dance, and that law and order have been re-established by force."

The qualities of the control that is re-established are epitomized by the Bargee, whose sole motive for taking action is personal advantage. Being totally unscrupulous, the Bargee sides with whoever is in power, and the fact that he plays the role of the Devil in the Mummers' Play adds a poignantly ironic dimension to his activities. "[G]ive me some

room to swing me tiller . . ."he shouts significantly as his barge is being loaded and the Devil himself prepares to bring the recruiting party to the strikebound community; but the figure who eventually sticks a rifle into Musgrave's back and boasts to the dragoons and the magistrates that, ' 7 caught him, / caught him, / used me strategy!" clearly is not in charge to the extent that he wants us to believe. He emerges, however, as a most illuminating reflection of the figures who do come out on top, namely those members of the community who can truly greet the dragoons as saviours.

In Serjeant Musgrave's Dance, then, Arden presents a story or a fable, to use a Brechtian term sometimes also employed by Arden which derives its basic structure from the clash between the type of Mummers' Play known as the Wooing Ceremony and the ideas promoted by a Crom-wellian Recruiting Sergeant. By setting the action in Victorian times, Arden achieves a perspective which heightens the effect of his fable, bringing it closer to the modern spectator and yet leaving it at a certain distance where its overall significance is more easily discerned. Any attempts by the spectator to identify with the character of Musgrave are plainly doomed to end in frustration and confusion: this Serjeant needs to be seen in the context of the fable as a whole. As Arden has stated in an article published only a couple of years after Serjeant Musgrave's Dance:

A play that is a sermon and no more will be in danger of preaching only to the converted. But if the sermon is expressed in terms of a poetic statement (either of the bad life that is, or the good life that could be, or of both contrasted) and given to the audience to hold, as it might be a ripe apple, so that they could look at it all round and decide for themselves by touch and feel whether it is sound or not then one may have some hope of effecting a change in somebody's heart.

The bad life that is, contrasted with the good life that could be, all expressed in terms of a poetic statement ... the description neatly encapsulates the action and form of Serjeant Musgrave's Dance. Here an ostensibly simple clash of opposites is endowed with archetypal dimensions as a result of the application of the pattern of the Mummers' Play, and the poetic impact of this conflict is heightened by Arden's extensive use of ballad-style songs and verse. Serjeant Musgrave's Dance offers very good examples of the playwright's technique of employing songs and verse as a means of reaching through to his spectators and involving them emotionally in a conflict which subsequently unfolds also at a more intellectual level. In strikingly immediate terms, moreover, the songs and verse transmit that pulse of death and rebirth which beats with such vigour not only in early drama but in a whole range of twentieth-century writings besides Arden's play.

The verse in Serjeant Musgrave's Dance helps to crystallize the significance of the primary colours, black and white, red and green, which pervade the play like a visual echo of its basic rhythm. More importantly, the songs and verse bring out and enhance the stylization of the characters which is so central to the overall design of the play, setting the female characters sharply against the males. As the themes of the songs and verse revolve around woman as the provider of life and love, while man is seen as her transient partner, the cycle of life and death is in effect condensed in the verse used

in the play. This cycle is epitomized by the life of the soldier, which is a recurring subject of the ballads and the verse in Serjeant Musgrave's Dance and which, invariably, is depicted as a brief spell of vigour and aggressive virility in the looming shadow of death. By contrast, the unique and mysterious powers of the women are mirrored in poetic utterances which are remarkably perceptive and even prophetic, while the limitations of the magistrates are underlined by the fact that songs and verse are quite beyond their reach: the dour men in charge of this community can express themselves only in prose.

In the case of Shakespeare's Macbeth, the combination of two sections from the medieval Cycle Plays provides a distinctive form for the tragedy and adds a significant moral dimension to the story of the Scottish usurper. In Serjeant Musgrave's Dance, the Mummers' Play fulfils the equivalent functions, but it also plays a third role which is at least as important as the other two. The Mummers' Play is, by definition, an expression of the life of the community. Arden's employment of this ancient pattern enables him not only to pinpoint what he sees as the causes of its distortion, but, more immediately, to bring into focus the inherent potential of the community. "[B]egin again" is the recurring call at the end of the scene in the marketplace, and any spectator who has followed the plot of Arden's play will be able to perceive the negative implications of this new beginning. When the underlying patterns are taken into account, however, the call also acquires a more challenging note. Arden is not an irresponsible romantic making a plea for a return to the distant past when the ritual of the Mummers' Play had a central communal function; but he is making a plea for the community, and more especially for the ordinary people who have the capacity to maintain it as a living organism. Serjeant Musgrave's Dance is thus not merely a story of life and love and their oppression. With its combination of historical scope, dramatic effectiveness, and poetic impact, this fable is ultimately designed to impart to the spectator some of that awareness which is the first prerequisite for change.

Source: Helena Forsas-Scott, "Life and Love and Serjeant Musgrave: An Approach to Arden's Play," in Modern Drama, March, Vol. 26, 1983, no. 1, pp. 1-11.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, Lagarde discusses similarities between Serjeant Musgrave's Dance and various plays by Shakespeare, notably Julius Caesar, Macbeth, and Romeo and Juliet.

Serjeant Musgrave's Dance, no doubt, may be considered first and foremost as a twentieth century reworking of *The Recruiting Officer*, inspired or influenced by Brecht's vision of Farquhar's comedy, the 1955 Berlin repertoire production of*Pauken und Trompeten*, with a few touches from Brecht's own *Mutter Courage*. Yet, whatever the international influences at play in the world of theatre nowadays, an English dramatist cannot forget he was nurtured on a national tradition which began in the Renaissance and John Arden, who acknowledged his debt to Ben Jonson in *The Waters of Babylon*, cannot be an exception. Indeed the reader of *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* more than once gathers the impression that Shakespeare was pent up in Arden's mind, ready to gush forth, from the moment of the inception to that of the definitive draft.

The turning-point in the plot, when the soldiers lose all hope of gaining the support of the colliers, comes, everyone will agree, after Annie has revealed the hole in Sparky's tunic which confounds Musgrave and indicts the Army:

(holding up the tunic). Hey, here's the little hole where they let in the bayonet. Eee, aie, easily in. His blood's on my tongue, so hear what it says. A bayonet is a raven's beak. This tunic's a collier's jacket. The scarecrow's a birdcage. (*SMD*, III.1.101)

Now this sounds like a clear recollection of Antony's speech and tactics to move the Roman plebians. The situation is the same; Brutus has explained that Caesar's ambition constituted a threat to the citizens' liberties and that death was the only solution; so Musgrave has tried to convince the colliers that British ambition, greed and callousness were the causes of the rebellion in the distant protectorate and consequently that the Mayor, the Parson and the Constable are guilty of Billy's death as well as of the natives' sufferings at the hands of Her Majesty's soldiers; on both occasions the orator at first carries the conviction of his listeners (though a modern audience demands nuances and Arden's earnest collier, Walsh, provides the necessary dissenting voice). As Antony leaves the pulpit and 'descends' into the midst of his fellow-Romans, so Annie has ceremoniously 'come down the ladder', taken possession of the centre of the platform and mixed with her fellow-citizens the better to move them; as Antony plucks the mantle off Caesar's corpse, so Annie has Mrs Hitchcock throw her the 'bundle' and reveals the rent tunic of the Army's other victim to incense the lookers-on. Actually the words *His blood's on my tongue* spring from the same rhetorical trick of introducing the blood and wounds as orators and the speaker as a mere mouthpiece for a dead friend; though Antony's cultivated mind may resort to more elaborate language and prompt the revolt that the forlorn barmaid cannot even wish for, consciously or unconsciously:

Show you sweet Caesar's wounds, poor dumb mouths, And bid them speak for me [...] [...] and put a tongue In every wound of Caesar, that should move The stones of Rome to rise and mutiny (*Julius Caesar*, III.2.227-8, 229-31),

there exists a great similarity in the technique of the two characters as well as in the end result. Not only does Arden remember and reproduce the circumstances and details of how a crowd switch their support, but he makes the back-drop of the mining town resemble that of Caesar's Rome: the rumours of wars and rebellions, the presence of the army at the gates. After the arrival of the dragoons and the restoration of law and order, Walsh bitterly remarks that being *saved* means that *We're back where we were (SMD*, III.1.105); one might say as much of Rome after the check on tyranny devised by Brutus and Cassius, for the shadow of dictatorship has not fled the city. One might also argue that the liberator of the mining town, the officer, the young man (SMD, III. 1.1.04), is the very apt counterpart of Octavius, whom Shakespeare conceived of as a young man, in opposition to Antony. Furthermore, the Bargee, a modern avatar of the Lord of Misrule, who changes sides as easily as a weather-cock and whose mind constantly dwells on drinks and destruction, stands as a good epitome of the crowds that Shakespeare paints in Julius Caesar and elsewhere. The title-hero, however, is the character that gains most from a contamination by the Roman play; his profession and his illicit return to the mother-country may, at first sight, suggest a resemblance with Julius Caesar, his death being the only means of exorcizing fear; on second thought, though, it is with Brutus that Musgrave has greater affinities, for both evince idealism, self-control and re-lentlessness of purpose and both for the first half of the play subjugate other characters, forcing them to endorse their vision of things. Moreover, during their abortive attempt to murder the men in office, the conspirators and liberators, Musgrave and Hurst, quarrel, not unlike Brutus and Cassius after Caesar's death, because they disagree on their deeper motives.

True, Brutus is haunted by the ghost of Caesar before and during the battle at Philippi, whereas Musgrave never flinches after his defeat. If the serjeant feels the panges of remorse, it is before he embarks upon the final stage of his mission, at the time of Sparky's murder in the stable, and scene 3 of act II seems to owe more to Macbeth than to any other play. First, Mrs Hitchcock visits Musgrave when the latter is oppressed by nightmares and not only re-lives the ordeal of the repression but lives the revenge to come since the number of victims, twenty-five, fits either situation equally well. Mrs Hitchcock brings him a grog, just as Lady Macbeth has been expected to prepare a drink for her husband on the fatal night. Like Macbeth, Musgrave should have been 'against the deed' in both the foreign and the mining town, since in both places he was welcomed as the man bearing the weapons to protect others, not to kill his hosts. While Macbeth is a prey to his fears and hallucinations, the two grooms of the chamber snore away the time, exactly as Attercliffe and Hurst snore during the greatest part of Musgrave's nerve-racking nightmares; for like Macbeth the serjeant hath murdered sleep, the innocent sleep. Keeping Macbeth's hallucinations in mind, the public better understands Musgrave's part in the scene, Musgrave who follows the book (the Bible and the Queen's Book) as irresistibly as the Scottish felon follows the dagger of the mind. The infernal concatenation of murders, which is masterfully illustrated in Macbeth, is also one of the lessons of Serjeant Musgrave's Dance, in this scene especially. The

final hecatomb in Shakespeare's tragedy is ushered in by the apparition of Lady Macbeth sleepwalking in her nightgown; Mrs Hitchcock, in her nightgown also, heralds the many deaths, the first of which, that of Sparky, is concomitant with her visit; no matter if it is the woman who is wide awake and the man a near somnambulist here, the resemblance forces itself upon the minds of the audience, all the more easily as Arden stresses, thanks to the two distinct acting areas, downstage and upstage, the incongruity of the bar-owner's proffered comfort for the Serjeant's metaphysical anxiety, the two characters living then on as surely different planes as Lady Macbeth and her husband in the last act of the tragedy Musgrave (now shouting in his sleep) (SMD, II.3.70) being reminiscent of the night-shriek in Dunsinane.

In the same scene (II.3) there remains one echo of Macbeth, a very distinct verbal echo, which seems to fit the dramatic situation far less satisfactorily; Attercliffe, after rejecting the advances of Annie, looks at his hands and quotes Musgrave:

Our Black Jack'd [...] say there's blood on these two hands. (He looks at his hands with distaste.) You can wipe'em as often as you want on a bit o'yellow hair, but it still comes blood the next time so why bother, he'd say (SMD, II.3.67),

which must remind everyone of Lady Macbeth's obsession with the damned spot on her hand (Macbeth, V. 1.34), rather than of Macbeth' s horror earlier in the play (Macbeth, II. 1.59-63), for the possibility no longer exists of 'clearing' the guilty one of his 'deed' with a little water; Attercliffe's reflection comes at a moment when a woman's love can no longer assuage his sorrow, which can compare with the Shakespearian heroine's predicament in act V. Now the scene in Serjeant Musgrave's Dance also evokes Romeo and Juliet, in reverse as it were; Hurst has repelled Annie, because instead of anticipating the pleasures of the night he fears the cold of the morning (SMD, II.3.64-5): As far as my mind goes, it's morning already. Every one alone that's all; one at once thinks of Juliet's passionate longing for the night and of her plea in favour of Romeo's prolonging their happiness together in defiance of the morning's threats. Once the resemblance has been taken for granted, the scene between Sparky and Annie appears in a new light and recalls that of the Verona lovers who also fight against a hostile environment and resort to ruse and concealment. Indeed in the eyes of Juliet's Nurse, the heroine's sentiments seem to waver, to favour Tybalt, then Romeo and, why not, Paris by turns; Annie may give the same impression to the casual observer, Mrs Hitchcock for instance and all those that take her for a whoor-to-the-soldiers, when she comes to settle her affections on Sparky for good, though she has passed from one box to the other, from one soldier to the next. When Annie comes down the ladder to be reunited with the skeleton of her former lover, one is almost tempted to associate it with the ladder which the Nurse procures and by the which your love [i.e. Romeo] Must climb a bird's nest soon when it is dark (Romeo and Juliet, II.5.73-4), the descent towards death having replaced the ascent towards life, though it is equally prompted by love, and the winter morning has replaced the summer night.

If all these similitudes and analogies are accepted, Annie's 'song-ballad' to describe Musgrave's parentage:

The North Wind in a pair of millstones

Was your father and your mother

They got you in a cold grinding (*SMD*, 1.3.32)

expresses the same 'stricture and abstinence' and savours of the same wit as Lucio's tales of Angelo's begetting:

They say, this Angela was not made by man and woman, after the downright way of creation [. ..]. Some report a sea-maid spawned him. . .some,thathe was begot between two stock-fishes. . .But it is certain, that when he makes water, his urine is congealed ice. (Measure for Measure, III.2.101-3, 105-8)

Again, when Annie portrays Hurst wandering down by the canal, all alone and wretched and, to tease him, sings with fierce emphasis:

All round his hat he wore the green willow / (SMD, 11.3.65),

one instinctively thinks of Desdemona's song of the willow and its evocation of a forsaken lover. Later, the Bargee's ballad, Hark hark the drums do bark (SMD, III. 1.83), suggests Ariel's song when the spirit leads Ferdinand along the yellow sands:

The burthen. . . Hark!

Hark!

'Burthen dispersedly.' Bow-wow!

Ariel. The watch-dogs bark:

Burthen. Bow-wow!

Ariel. Hark, hark, I hear

The strain of strutting chanticleer

Cry-.

(*The Tempest*, 1.2.382-9)

Although Arden's prose does not echo Shakespeare's verse so obviously as it does nursery rhymes at times ('Baa, baa, black sheep', II. 1.56 andll.3.69, or 'London's burning, London's burning!', II.3.70), it would no doubt be quite easy to discover other Shakespearian traces. What must be asserted is that no one can read or see Serjeant Musgrave 's Dance without calling to mind the great model that Shakespeare has remained, even after the 1956 bang of Look Back in Anger. Dissociated from his Renaissance counterparts or ancestors, the Bargee loses much of his fascination; the very title of Arden's plays suggests a typically Elizabethan and Jacobean convention, for

to Musgrave's dance there responds the Bargee's dance, which closes the 'un-historical parable' proper III.2 is hardly more than an epilogue and in which the spectators on the stage join the professional merrymaker as the assassins joined hands at the end of a revenge tragedy or as courtiers and professional dancers joined in masques and antimasques. Quite naturally, borrowing, which ranges from unconscious reminiscence to patent imitation, may turn to parody, witness the officer's proclamation:

The winter's broken up. Let normal life begin again (SMD, III.1.105),

promising the dawn of a new golden age when everything points to unchanged and unchangeable misery for all but the representatives of the powers that be. Irony does not detract from indebtedness or from adhesion to a tradition; irony and parody are only methods of adaptation.

Source: Fernand Lagarde, "Shakespearian Reminiscences in *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* ," in *Cahiers Elisabethains*, Vol. 17, 1980, pp. 77-81.

Critical Essay #4

In the following essay, Adler suggests that Musgrave's first dance partakes of ritual elements in "a grotesque parody of the Christian 'slaying of winter' the Crucifixion and a perversion of its essential meaning."

In a recent article, Mary B. O'Connell suggests that John Arden's Serjeant Musgrave's Dance is "a contemporary folk ritual" whose "characterization and plot development" are modeled on the medieval Mummers Play of Plough Monday, which traditionally was "a mime slaying of winter." The purpose here is not to dispute Miss O'Connell's suggestion, since the Plough Monday play might well be the inspiration behind some elements in Arden's drama, especially the second dance near the end during which "Each man takes his drink, swigs a large gulp, then links wrists with the previous one, until all are dancing around the centrepiece in a chorus, singing." I suggest, however, that the first dance in the play, undertaken near the beginning of Act III by Musgrave alone, partakes of ritual elements of a more specifically religious nature. Here Musgrave, "waving his rifle, his face contorted with demonic fury," dances around "an articulated skeleton dressed in a soldier's tunic and trousers," hanging from "the cross-bar" in the town square, in what is obviously a grotesque parody of the Christian "slaying of winter" the Crucifixion and a perversion of its essential meaning.

Arden' s debt to medieval drama is well-known: his modern mystery play, *The Business of Good Government*, written for performance during Christmastime, is, as John Russell Taylor says, "of a radiant grace and simplicity which make clear some of the lessons Arden has learned from a study of the medieval stage..."; and Robert John Jordan has rightly singled out certain aspects of the characterization and conflict in *Musgrave's Dance* as "almost morality-play in style." Although there was never any literal dance around the cross in the Crucifixion plays in the medieval mystery cycles, Christ's death was seen as the climactic event in the sacred history of mankind from the Creation to the Last Judgment in that it reconciled man with God and was thus the culmination of God's salvific dance of grace on earth.

Arden's stage directions specify a number of visual images and gestures which would suggest to the audience a re-enactment of the Crucifixion albeit in a parodic way in the hoisting of the skeleton and Musgrave's demonic dance around it. The description of the stage set for Act III, Scene One, states that "In the centre of the stage is a practicable feature the centre-piece of the market place. It is a sort of Victorian clock-tower-cum-lamppost-cum-market-cross, and stands on a raised plinth. There is a ladder leaning against it." (The last two photographs of the English production which are published at the back of the Grove Press edition of the play show very well how the crosslike formation of this centre-piece dominates the setting.) Two other stage directions dictating gesture and movement by the actors would also play on the audience's awareness of Christian symbology and call to mind Christ's crucifixion: when Attercliffe, the pacifist follower of Musgrave, jumps in front of Hurst's galling gun to prevent him from opening fire on the crowd, he "stands on the step of the plinth . .. with his arms spread out" in a Christlike pose; and when the skeleton of Billy Hicks is removed from

the cross-bar, his former mistress Annie "sits with it on her knees," cradling it in her arms in a visual image reminiscent of the Pieta.

If the central message of Christ's crucifixion is one of love and reconciliation the inauguration of a new dispensation of forgiveness , then Musgrave's fanatical plan for revenge a throwback to the old dispensation of "an eye for an eye" vengeance is antithetical to the meaning of the cross. Musgrave is correct in his original assumption that his gospel of no more war coincides with the Word of God, particularly as expressed by Christ in the Sermon on the Mount; as Musgrave says, "without God" such a proclamation of peace is but "a bad belch and a hiccup." He desires to "Let the word dance," but, ignoring the lesson of the Crucifixion, errs in his conviction that "God's dance on this earth" must be a thing of fear and trembling; "The Word alone is terrible: the Dance must be worse." Arden dramatically underscores Musgrave's failure to perceive that God's dance is one of mercy rather than of strict, retributive justice. When Musgrave prays, "keep my mind clear so I can weigh Judgement against the Mercy and Judgement against the Blood, and make this Dance as terrible as You have put it into my brain," the Bargee undercuts the Serjeant's petition as he "parodies his attitude behind his back" and at the end "gives a sanctimonious smirk and breathes 'Amen'."

Seen against the backdrop of Christ's life-bringing death on the Cross, Musgrave's "crucifixion" of the skeleton of the dead Hicks is life-denying, thus perverting a symbol of mercy and love into an embodiment and justification of vengeance. As Annie, the force of life and love in the play, perceives, this is the "old true-love gone twisted," malformed and transformed into something akin to hate. This is supported by the recurrent symbol of the "twisted little dead" baby which she conceived just before Hicks went off to war: "when it wor born, it came a kind of bad shape, pale, sick: it wor dead and in the ground in no more nor two month. About the time they called *him* [Billy] dead, y' see." The baby buried in the ground and Billy's skeleton hanging from the cross-bar are the two most pervasive *momenta mori* emblems in a play filled with the aura of death with the cold of winter rather than the warmth of spring.

For the movement from death to life, from winter to spring, which is an important motif in both the Mummers Play of Plough Monday and the Christian observance of the Crucifixion and Resurrection each Eastertime, is really quite muted in *Musgrave's Dance*. Hicks' "crucifixion" has not led to a new era of peace; as the innkeeper Mrs. Hitchcock says, the townspeople's dance at the end is "not a dance of joy." And Attercliffe knows why this is so: "you can not end it [war] by its own rules: no bloody good." Musgrave tried to unmask the absurdity of war by extending the reign of bloodshed and terror. Now Musgrave's own folly is unmasked, for no shedding of blood in the name of peace is good.

But Mrs. Hitchcock does suggest the tentative hope that what Musgrave attempted to achieve through the wrong means will someday be accomplished through the right means: "Let's hope it, any road, Eh." The ballad that Attercliffe sings to conclude the play makes the contrast between "a blood-red rose-flower" a symbol for the soldiers throughout the play and "the apple [which] holds a seed will grow / In live and lengthy joy / To raise a flourishing tree of fruit / For ever and a day." The apple, significantly

enough, becomes the major symbol of life and hope in the play. Popularizations of the Biblical story of the Fall in Genesis 3 identify the fruit of the forbidden tree as the apple; and according to Apocryphal legends, which influenced much medieval literature, seeds from that same fruit sprung up into the tree from which Christ's cross is hewn. Thus, as the Catholic liturgy for Passiontide emphasizes, man's salvation is accomplished upon the tree of the cross so that life might be restored through the very same instrument that brought death. So, too, Attercliffe and Musgrave, hanging "higher nor most apple-trees grow," might someday "start an orchard." Their deaths, dancing from a noose in expiation for using bloody means to end war, may be one step closer than Hicks' "crucifixion " to inaugurating God's dance of love and peace on earth.

Source: Thomas P. Adler, "Religious Ritual in *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*," in *Modern Drama*, Vol. 16, 1973, pp. 163-66.

Critical Essay #5

In the following essay, Thome describes Musgrave as an "Old Testament avenger" in a morality play indebted to the Elizabethan romantic and dramatic tradition.

Next to Harold Pinter, John Arden is perhaps the most respected contemporary English playwright. And this despite the fact he has made a break with realism which carries his work back in method to the Renaissance. His best known play, written in 1959 and signalling his break with kitchen sink realism, is *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*. But Arden's acceptance has not been instantaneous, nor have his plays lasted long at the box office on their first run.

Musgrave, for example, lasted 28 performances, largely because its initial audiences could fathom neither its medium nor its message. The liberal spectators saw in the play a tract about pacifism which seemed to show that pacifism does not work. The conservatives saw a statement that human weakness and evil confound the liberal idealism of the naive.

One of the problems with the play is that Arden does not take sides; he merely presents the humanity of a series of contradictory points of view on the same issue. Unfortunately, he loses the thread briefly toward the end of *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, and like his main character scribbles on the orderly tablet of his plot and theme.

As a result, the confused message of this modern morality play leaves not only the angry men of the cast but also the audience unsure of what has been accomplished by the action of the plot. Surprisingly, however, the play has actually worked on stage for subsequent audiences, especially after the B.B.C. television production of 1962. Its emotional impact seems heightened rather than lessened by the folk stylization, particularly the choric role played by the women and the enigmatic Bargee. And though the moral is blurred in the final scene, the audience's emotional reaction remains strongly positive.

Arden's depiction of the protest crusade of Musgrave, Sparky, Hurst, and Attercliffe seems more than commonly indebted to the Elizabethan dramatic tradition. The play appears to deliberately incorporate the Elizabethan romantic tradition in plot structure and incidental device, for example in the use of songs and comic dance and action, thereby producing a modern Elizabethan hybrid, a tragicomedy. The romantic plot structure and the folk stylization serve to relieve the sombre quality of the basic action and the Jehovian madness of the central character, Black Jack Musgrave. Like Os-borne's The Entertainer and several of Pinter's plays, Musgrave owes a good deal as well to the British music hall tradition.

Arden portrays Serjeant Musgrave as an Old Testament avenger stirred out of his habitual guidelines for living (the Book of Regulations) by the inconsistencies of a colonial war.

Unable to reconcile the book and the fact, Musgrave substitutes books, the Book of the Lord for the Book of Regulations. With the power of a new set of regulations, the Word and hence the Power of the Lord, Musgrave convinces himself that military tactics and Old Testament reprisal should be used to force the people at home to see the evil of his "Colonial War."

Of his three confederates, only Private Attercliffe sees the error of Musgrave's ways, though Attercliffe, too, is limited by the torture of conscience.

To end it by its own rules: no bloody good. She's right, you're wrong. You can't cure the pox by further whoring. Sparky died of those damned rules. And so did the other one.

Attercliffe's discovery during the play is that all war, not just a particular colonial war, is evil. The individual life and the individual death, contrary to the philosophy of Musgrave's perverted evangelism, are very much "material."

Musgrave has adopted without question the role of a military Messiah, bringing the word of the Lord by the doctrine of "measure for measure" as a panacea for ending his war. Obsessed with the brutality and inhumanity of a colonial war, Musgrave sees himself as an instrument of God sent to punish sinners. But he is tragically unaware that he has become an extension of the very thing he has come to defeat. As Attercliffe hysterically cries to him in Act Two, scene one, "We've come to stop it, not to starlit..."

Confusing his motives and methods, Musgrave attempts to use the methods of the army in crushing a colonial rebellion to bring his message to the people at home. To appease his own conscience, he is willing to create a bloodbath by turning a galling gun on a square full of civilians. This device simply restates in symbolic dramatic terms Musgrave's poinl lhal "Iheir riols and our war are Ihe same one corruption." And il makes clear lhal Musgrave's motive is lo work Ihe guill for Ihe slaughter of particular people back lo Ihe individual at home.

The tragic irony in Ihe play, Ihen, is lhal Ihe Serjeanl's melhod for curing Ihe ills of Ihe world is jusl as confused and evil as anyone else's despite Ihe suggestion lhal his motivation was initially jusl. Though only Allercliffe sees all war as sin Sparky comes very, close in his halting suggestion of "paying Ihrough love," a New Teslamenl conversion of Musgrave's measure for measure.

The women, of course, indicl Ihe tragic domestic resulls of war and poverty. Through his use of Ihe folk songs and Ihe choric function of Annie and Mrs. Hilchcock, Arden makes clear lhal Ihe women condemn violence as a means of social prolesl or political change.

By means of carefully developed parallels be-Iween representatives of Managemenl, Labour, Church, and Stale, *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* becomes more lhan an anti-war documenl, for il depends on Ihe coordinating function of Ihe Bargee lo establish ils composite meaning. The Bargee is primarily a personification of crooked, distorted human nalure! Crooked Old Joe Bludgeon tempts, is tempted, and finally leads the gothically grotesque dance around the centrepiece upon which Billy Hicks has been gruesomely resurrected. In his use of the Bargee as an "interlocutor" figure, Arden

cleverly melds the classical and folk dramatic traditions. Old Joe Bludgeon simulates crowd reactions, recounts action off stage, adds a refrain dimension to the plot, and initiates action by playing on the weaknesses and desires of the Parson, the Mayor, Walsh, and the women.

The Bargee is then a mocking figure of intrigue reminiscent of the Vice figure of Renaissance morality plays. Symbolizing the potential evil of man's nature, he therefore extends the meaning of the play beyond conventional warfare, beyond the battle of the pitmen and the Establishment, to the violence, the heart of darkness, which may afflict all men. As Arden points out in his introduction to the Evergreen edition of the play, "The Bargee is something of a grotesque, a hunchback ... very rapid in his movements, with a natural urge towards intrigue and mischief." That the Bargee represents the very thing Musgrave is battling against is made clear in Mrs. Hitchcock's speech in Act Three, scene two, when she exclaims despairingly, "All I can see is Crooked Joe Bludgeon having his dance out in the middle of fifty Dragoons!"

The Bargee's mockery of the main figures is designed to supply exposition, but his temptation of the Parson to use soldiers to control the colliers also suggests his similarity to the Vice tradition. He represents the self-seeking egotism of man which precipitates not only battles between coal-owners and pitmen, but colonial wars as well. The Bargee's temptation of Walsh, to use the galling gun in forcing the mine owners to capitulate, establishes a clear parallel between Walsh and Musgrave. Walsh, the union leader, has been stung into action by injustice, but he is just as willing as Musgrave to allow the end to justify any means used.

Equally single-minded, he also wishes to force the whole of society to accept the rules for a single group, in fact to foster anarchy. Ironically, both these reform leaders live to see crooked human nature defeat their idealism. Walsh's capitulation and eventual joining of the beer dance therefore symbolize the triumph of egotistic self-interest.

The folk stylization of the play is integrated with the role of the Bargee to coordinate the action. The ballads themselves, of course, pick up major themes and sections of the action to counterpoint or restate them. This folk device, characteristic of traditional mummer's plays, the British music hall, or musical comedy in general, adds colour and variety to the play, despite the stark setting and the stripped stage. And ritual elements introduced into the play also increase the strength of its message. At the end of Act One, scene three, Musgrave delivers his stylized "Let the world dance" speech. In the following act, the Bargee acts as a refrain to Musgrave's address to the colliers. Earlier the incantatory delivery of the cemetery scene accentuates the red and black symbolism in the dialogue. Red is the color of the "blood-red rose flower" which is the central image of the play, and dominates the black and white of the winter coal town. As Arden explains, black is for death and the coal mines. Red is for murder and the red coat the collier puts on to escape his black..

The humour of the songs, as well as that of Sparky and the Bargee, extends the scope of the play and cushions its action. The songs and dialogue are so obviously reminiscent of Rudyard Kipling's Barrack Room Ballads as to give the impression of

what Ronald Bryden calls "the black North and red-coated imperialism." The Bargee's song at the beginning of Act Three, for example, is typical of the play's satirical attacks upon the Establishment:

Hip hip hooroar

Hark hark the drums do bark

The Hungry Army's coming to town

Lead 'em in with a Holy Book

A golden chain and a scarlet gown.

And the chant-like delivery of the theme "A soldier's duty is a soldier's life" is heightened by punctuating drum rolls and the maniacal dance of Musgrave. The song he sings complements the theme of death and duty.

Though Arden is certainly criticizing the methods of British imperialism, the colour imagery of the play generates meaning beyond simple indictment of war in general or the British colonial Raj in particular. In fact the play envelopes all of its characters in its controlling irony and leaves none unscathed by its searching scrutiny of human nature.

At the level of political allegory, *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* seems to play no favourites. Both Management and Labour become self-seeking and ludicrous in their struggle to advance an egocentric point of view. In the "angry" tradition of British drama, Arden moves from the principle of corrupt human nature to corrupt society. Motivated by the self-interest symbolized by the Bargee, workers and managers meet in conflict, so that "war" is presented as a basic fact of the human condition. Like Jimmy Porter and the other prototypal anger figures of the sixties, Serjeant Musgrave's "hurt" has angered him into violence. Emotion by-passing reason, he lashes out at a system he cannot reconcile with the "materialities" of life as he experiences it.

The point has been made elsewhere that what began "with the power and sureness of a legend or ballad peters out in discussion." The judgement that the final working out of the moral is clouded and confused in the "apple orchard scene" between Musgrave and Mrs. Hitchcock seems a just criticism of Serjeant Musgrave 's Dance. For the balletic quality of the play is lost here in a debate during which the audience cannot see the woods for the trees. The Christian Soldiers, confused and launched on a vendetta to clear mind and conscience, have ended lost in a trackless wood.

Though Eden's taint seems in the background of the apple orchard song at the end of the play, Arden's intention is unclear. Will the ritual gesture of self-sacrifice and the wildwood madness of Musgrave bear fruit? Will it be remembered? Probably not! For the implication of the play is that, when the "blood-dimmed tide is loosed," all the world goes wild-wood mad.

That violence begets only more violence is underscored by the central irony of the play Sparky's accidental death. Again Attercliffe is the incidental cause and carries the taint of guilt despite his good intentions. Guilt by association, of course, is exactly what they have come to prove. Ironically, however, they prove it only on themselves. The villagers remain substantially untouched by their sacrificial gesture, forced into foolish acquiescence by economic circumstances and a solid ring of red coated dragoons.

Source: Barry Thome, "*Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*: Form and Meaning," in *Queen's Quarterly*, Vol. 78, 1971, pp. 567-71.

Adaptations

Serjeant Musgrave's Dance was adapted for television by Granada Television for the BBC in 1961.

Topics for Further Study

Compare and contrast the character of Serjeant Musgrave with Mother Courage from Bertolt Brecht' s play Mother Courage and her Children. How does armed conflict impact the lives of these characters?

Research psychological and sociological writings on army life and desertion. How do the military characters in the play embody these theories? Why do Hurst, Attercliffe, and Sparky follow Musgrave's orders as long as they do?

What was the state of the British economy at the time of the play, particularly in the north of England? Focus on the impact of labor strikes. Does this give you a new perspective on the characters of the colliers? Are economic conditions part of the reason why the colliers are not as sympathetic to Musgrave's message as he expects them to be?

Pick one of the dances, songs, or poems in Serjeant Musgrave's Dance. Research its origin and history. You might choose "Michael Finnegan," the song often whistled by the Bargee. What does the song or dance add to the play and how does it reflect the play's themes?

Compare and Contrast

1880: Queen Victoria rules Great Britain; she is in the forty-third year of her rule. She has significant political power.

1959: Queen Elizabeth II is in the seventh year of her reign. Her political role is small; instead, the parliamentary system sets policy.

Today: Queen Elizabeth II continues her rule. She is basically a figurehead with minimal political influence.

1880: Great Britain is a significant world power, with significant colonial holdings in Asia and Africa.

1959: Many of Great Britain's colonial holdings had gained or were seeking independence. India had gained independence in 1947.

Today: Great Britain has a few colonial holdings and protectorates.

1878: Great Britain acquires Cyprus at the Congress of Berlin.

1959: Greek and Turkish Cypriots demand their independence from Great Britain. Within a year, the request is granted although Britain retains the areas around their military bases.

Today: Internal strife between Greek and Turkish Cypriots has resulted in a split on the island. While an independent country of Cyprus covers most of the island, one-third of the island is the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.

What Do I Read Next?

The Royal Pardon: The Soldier Who Became an Actor (1966)is a play written by Arden and his wife. It also concerns a soldier who deserts the army.

Voices from the Ranks: A Personal Narrative of the Crimean Campaign by a Serjeant of the Royal Fusiliers is a memoir written by Timothy Gowling and edited by Kenneth Fenwich. Published in 1954, the book reflects on the conditions of army life during the Crimean War.

Arden's 1960 play entitled Happy Haven features characters who question and rebel against authority.

Written by Bertolt Brecht in 1941, Mother Courage and Her Children is an antiwar epic that illustrates the devastating effects of violence and war.

Further Study

Arden, John. "John Arden," in *Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series*, Volume 4, Gale Research, 1986, pp. 29-47.

This autobiographical essay reveals much about Arden's background, family, and childhood.

Page, Malcolm. *John Arden*, Twayne Publishers, 1984,175 p.

Full-length critical analyses of Arden's work, including *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance.*

Trussler, Simon. *John Arden*, Columbia University Press, 1973, 48 p.

A critical overview of Arden's work, including *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance.*

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Kauffmann, Stanley. "Colicos in Title Role of John Arden's Play," in *The New York Times*, March 9, 1966, p. 44.

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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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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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