Sleuth Study Guide

Sleuth by Anthony Shaffer

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Introduction

When *Sleuth* made its first appearance on the London stage in February 1970, it saw instant success. Moving to Broadway the following November, it won equal praise, even winning a Tony Award in 1971. In the program, audiences and reviewers were asked not to reveal the plot to anyone who had not yet seen the play, for so much of the enjoyment of the play was derived from its almost constant plot twists. Working on the idea of a whodunit, Shaffer instead created the first of its kind: a *whodunwhat*.

Part of the success of *Sleuth* comes from Shaffer's misappropriation of the mechanics of the classic murder mystery. More of the success derives from Shaffer's skill at scripting the play. It is filled with baroque language, exaggerated characters, and pompous intellectualism; yet its pretensions are consistently undercut with elements of the farcical, such as Milo's donning of the clown costume Another reason that audiences throughout the world have enjoyed it for years on end is that it is simply pure entertainment. Milo and Andrew match wits with the delicacy of cats inching around their prey. The audience is brought to points of both laughter and terror as the two men play, exchanging roles as cat and then as mouse, until their eventual downfall.

Author Biography

Anthony Shaffer was born in Liverpool, England, on May 15, 1926. The Shaffer family moved to London in 1942. From 1944 to 1947. Shaffer worked a period of conscription as a coal miner. Finishing that obligation, he attended Trinity College, in Cambridge, where he was editor of the university magazine, *Gnmta*. Later, Shaffer worked as a lawyer, but, after three years, he decided to become a journalist. He also worked in advertising, writing commercials, and in television, producing documentaries and plays.

Shaffer and his identical twin. Peter, co-wrote several mystery novels in the 1950s. He also wrote the film script for his brother's stage play *Black Comedy*. According to Shaffer, it was at the urging of his brother that he wrote his own first play, *The Savage Parade*, in 1963.

Six years elapsed before *Sleuth* reached the theater. It was an instant commercial and critical success, both in England and internationally. It ran for more than 2,300 performances in London and over 1,200 performances on Broadway, It also won a Tony Award (United States) in 1971. The success of *Sleuth* ensured Shaffer's continued career. He tried his hand at screenwriting with the movie adaptation of *Sleuth* (1972). He also wrote the screenplay for Alfred Hitchcock's film *Frenzy*, as well as an adaptation of the Agatha Christie mystery *Evil Under the Sun*. His writing efforts drew rave enthusiastic reviews.

In the theater, Shaffer followed *Sleuth* with *Murderer*, a play lhat featured numerous plot twists. Shaffer's next piay. *The Case of the Oily Levantine*, was revised for the United States as *Whodunnit*. It is a parody of the classic whodunit murder mystery. This play, produced in the United States in 1982. was Shaffer's last work for the next fifteen years. In the 1980s, he moved to Queensland, Australia, with his third wife, actress Diane Cilento, to launch an open-air theater. He eventually moved back to London, and in 1997, at the age of 71, he wrote a new play. *The Thing in the Wheelchair*, departing from the thriller genre that he had helped to create.

Plot Summary

Act I

Act 1 opens at Andrew Wyke's country house. The acclaimed mystery writer is working on his most recent novel, when the doorbell rings. At the door is Milo Tindle. Andrew has invited the younger man over to discuss Andrew's wife. Marguerite. Apparently. Milo wants to marry her. Andrew does not think that Milo will be able to keep Marguerite in the lavish style to which she has grown accustomed. However, Andrew has a mistress himself, and he is more than happy to have Marguerite taken off his hands. He proposes a plan, which he has already worked out: Milo will "steal" some jewels that Andrew owns and sell them abroad. Thus Milo will have the money needed to support Marguerite: Andrew will be done with his lavish wife and. at the same time, get a hefty settlement from his insurance agency.

Milo is initially suspicious. He is afraid of getting caught, and he is also afraid that Andrew will actually try to frame him for the theft. However, the lure of the money is too great for Miio. and he agrees to the plan.

Andrew has determined that Milo must actually 1 'break in" to the house to make the theft look real. He also wants Milo to wear a disguise. After the two men go through a hamper filled with costumes, Milo ends up dressed as a clown.

Milo goes outside to the shed, where Andrew has left a ladder. He uses the ladder to enter the upstairs gallery through the window. Milo wants to go straight for the safe, but Andrew insists that he ransack the house a bit, to make it look like he is looking for the jewels. Then Andrew takes Milo to the safe, explodes it, and hands Milo a jewel box. Andrew declares that, to make the burglary seem more real, they must enact a scene in which he, Andrew, surprises the burglar, and the two men struggle. He will then be able to give the police a false description of the intruder. The two men begin to toss things around the room and wrestle a bit. Out of his desk drawer, Andrew pulls a gun, which Milo can use to keep Andrew at bay. Andrew shoots several of the items around the room and then points the gun at Milo, while tying him up. Still holding the gun, Andrew declares that he is going to kill Milo He agrees that they have been playing a game all evening, a game in which he kills Milo, and no one suspects him. He tells Milo that he invited him over to create a foolproof murder scene. Milo tries to talk Andrew out of the plan. Andrew resists Milo's plea and pulls the trigger Milo falls down the stairs and lies still.

Act 2

Act 2 takes place two days later. Andrew is at home when the doorbell rings. He lets in Inspector Doppler of the Constable's office. Doppler is investigating the disappearance of Milo Tindle. Andrew claims to have met Milo a few months ago, but Doppler tells him

that Milo had reported that he was coming to see him, Andrew, two nights ago. He also tells Andrew that an eyewitness who was passing the house two nights ago claims to have seen a struggle taking place and to have heard three shots fired from a gun. Doppler then went to Mile's house, where he found the note that Andrew had sent him

Realizing he is trapped, Andrew explains that he and Milo were playing a game called Burglary. He teUs Doppler that Milo left about 9:30 that evening, and he hasn't seen him since. He says he only wanted to teach Milo a lesson. The story he tells Doppler is as it was portrayed in act 1. He then adds the information that he shot Milo with a blank bullet, Milo was so scared, however, that he fainted. He regained consciousness a few minutes later and went home.

Doppler does not believe Andrew's explanation and looks around He discovers bullet holes in the wall. At the spot where Andrew claims he shot Milo with the blank, Doppler discovers blood. Doppler looks out the window and asks about the mound of earth in the garden, which Andrew had not seen until then Doppler says they will dig up the garden, and, most likely, find Mile's body. He looks in the wardrobe and finds a jacket of Milo's, though Andrew claims that Milo changed back into his own clothes before he left.

Doppler proposes that the third bullet was, in fact, a live bullet. When Andrew discovered that he had killed Milo, he panicked and buried him in the garden. He will now take Milo down to the station. After Andrew is properly horrified at his impending fate of prison, Doppler reveals his true identity: he is Milo.

Milo wanted to get back at Andrew for scaring him. He had snuck into the house the day before to set the "crime" scene. Andrew says he hoped that Milo was not angry a few days before, that he just wanted to see if Milo was a "game-playing sort of person." Milo says he was not playing a game, he just wanted revenge. However, he then thinks his revenge was not great enough, for he was terrified with death, while Andrew was only teased with prison. Milo, however, wanting to draw level with Andrew in the "game," tells Andrew that he killed Andrew's girlfriend, Tea. Milo says that Tea stopped by the day before, surprising Milo. They had sex, and then Milo killed her. It is her body buried in the garden.

Now Andrew must play another game the game of finding the clues that Milo planted that will frame Andrew for the murder. He must do so in the next ten minutes, for Milo has already called the police. In a panic, Andrew calls Tea's house but finds that she is missing. Following Milo's clues, he looks for the evidence against him. He finds a bracelet he gave Tea and one of her shoes When the doorbell rings, the police having arrived, Andrew is still searching for the murder weapon. Milo goes to answer it as Andrew discovers, in the grandfather clock, the golden cord used to strangle Tea. Andrew hears Milo speaking with two police officers, but, once again, it is a ruse. Milo is merely mimicking their voices. There are no police officers at all.

Milo returns to Andrew. He tells him that Tea came by and agreed to play a part in the game. Milo goes to get Marguerite's fur coat. Andrew asks Milo to stay with him They are evenly matched game players, and he just wants someone to play with. Milo refuses

Andrew feels humiliated until he comes up with another plan. He pulls his gun out of the desk, explaining aloud what happened to an imaginary police inspector. He surprised a man with his wife's fur coat and shot nun dead. When Milo returns, he tells Andrew that the game won't work .He went to the police station and told them what happened on Fnday. He realized that the police were not going to do anything, which is when he decided to take his own revenge. Andrew does not believe Milo He says he is going to shoot Milo, this time with real bullets. As Milo starts to leave, Andrew fatally shoots him. As Milo dies, a police car pulls up the driveway. An insistent knocking on the door is heard as the curtain falls.

Characters

Inspector Doppler

See Milo Tindle

Police Constable Higgs

See Milo Tmdle

Detective Sergeant Tarrant

See Milo Tindle

Milo Tindle

Milo Tindle, who also plays the roles for characters Inspector Doppler, Police Constable Higgs, and Detective Sergeant Tarrant, comes into Andrew Wyke's life because he is having an affair with Wyke's wife, Marguerite. At about thirty-five years old, Milo, who is younger than Wyke, is earned away by the romance of his affair. He and Marguerite want to marry and live their life in idyllic happiness in his rooms above his travel agency Andrew scoffs at Milo's plan, claiming that Marguerite is far too accustomed to luxury to maintain such a lifestyle; Milo goes along with Andrew's plan of a faked theft, which will bnng in a sizeable amount of insurance money, in order to supply Marguerite with a more luxurious living.

In devising his plan, Andrew is sure that he can best Milo, for he believes himself to be superior to his wife's lover. After all, Milo is (in the prejudiced eyes of Andrew) the son of an Italian immigrant and a British farm girl. He is also one-quarter Jewish. However, Andrew is surprised to find Milo a worthy opponent in the game playing. Unlike Andrew, Milo undertakes the game to seek revenge after Andrew nearly frightens Milo to death m the first stage of this game. He claims to find no real joy in the game itself, despite his facility at it Indeed, as he tells Andrew, he tried to have Andrew punished in the more usual manner, by going to the police with his story, but he feared they would not believe that Andrew tried to Mil him despite the physical evidence of the powder burns on Milo's hand. Milo feels he must take the actions he does in order to get even with Andrew. Though he does not acknowledge this, it is clear to the audience that he is also trying to win back his own self-respect.

Milo also takes on the role of Inspector Doppler, who comes to question Andrew about Milo's murder in act 2. Doppler is very skeptical of Andrew's story and is about to take Andrew down to the station when Milo begins to reveal himself through his use of

certain words, a vocabulary and style of speaking that Andrews recognizes as Milo's. Milo then peels off his disguise of hair and face makeup and body padding.

Milo further takes on the roles of Detective Sergeant Tarrant and Police Constable Higgs, though they never appear on stage

Andrew Wyke

Andrew Wyke is a successful mystery writer in his late fifties. He tries to maintain the appearance of youth, through hair dye, and virility, through references to a mistress, but he is unable to truly fool Milo. Andrew is obsessed with games and toys. His home is filled with toys of all sizes. He comes up with a plan to humiliate Milo for daring to try to take away his wife. He creates a complex game that the two men will play. Even his choice of costume a clown suit complete with big floppy shoes for Milo to wear during the fake break-in (in which Milo is supposed to steal valuables from Andrew so the two men can collect insurance money), suggests Andrew's obsession with games and toys.

Andrew claims that he no longer loves his wife and is glad that Milo is taking her off his hands. In truth, he deeply resents Milo's usurping his wife, particularly because he views Milo as inferior to himself due to Milo's parentage and lower-class status. As Milo aptly notes, Andrew is a snob, one more comfortable living in the made-up world of the consummate game player than the real world of people. Andrew's only attempt to cross over to the real world is actually a fusion of the two, as he invites Milo to stay with him so that the two men, equally matched, can continue to play their games together.

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Themes

Deception

The elaborate game playing that takes place in *Sleuth* is indicative of its most important theme: deception. Milo's "crime" against Andrew starts with an act of deception, that is, having an affair with his wife. To teach Milo a lesson about trying to fool a master at the art of deception, Andrew devises his plan. He succeeds in terrifying and humiliating Milo. By virtually holding Milo's life in his hand, Andrew demonstrates that Milo is in his control, despite the affair with Marguerite.

Milo responds in kind. He devises two plots of his own. First, he makes Andrew think that he will go to jail for murdering Milo, and then he makes Andrew think he will go to jail for murdering his girlfriend, Tea. The one deception following the other thoroughly convinces Andrew that he will go to prison for a crime he did not commit.

As Milo's true game-playing ability is revealed, Andrew feels that he has found an equal game player. He proposes they stay together and continue to play these games. Milo refuses to live in a world where puzzling another person an act of deception is the main goal. Both men end the play by committing their first honest acts: Andrew fatally shoots Milo, just as he said he would; and the police come to Andrew's home, based on Milo's report, just as Milo predicted.

The prevalence of deception is reinforced by other elements of the play. For instance, Tea's agreement to help Milo deceive Andrew plays a crucial role in Andrew's belief of the story that he had originally ridiculed. Disguises also play an important role. Milo dresses up as a clown, at Andrew's behest, when he "breaks in to the house," and, indeed, he is at the moment being played for a fool. In act 2, Milo disguises himself as Inspector Doppler and thoroughly deceives Andrew.

Revenge

Both men devise then: plans to exact revenge on the other. Andrew claims to merely want to play a game, but in truth, he is exceedingly angry that Andrew has dared to take away his wife, even if he does not want Marguerite for himself Further, Milo mocks what Andrew holds most dear, a world in which he has virtually lived his life the "dead world" of the classic detective story. Andrew, growing old and impotent, also resents Milo's youth and virility.

For his part, Milo feels compelled to come up with his game to get revenge. He had gone to the police with the story of what Andrew did to him, but the police didn't really seem to believe him despite the evidence of a powder burn from the gun on his hand.

Theft

The theme of theft has both an actual and a symbolic role in *Sleuth*. Milo has stolen away Andrew's wife. In his fantasy, as well, Milo steals Andrew's mistress, Tea. Andrew's plan to get back at Milo involves the faked theft of jewels. The final confrontation between the two men revolves around the purported theft of Marguerite's fur coat. Because of these instances, the theme of theft takes on an ironic slant. Shaffer exploits this irony in his choice of dialogue. For instance, Andrew tries to explain to Inspector Doppler what happened between him and Milo as a game called Burglary.

Class and Race

Andrew demonstrates class and racial prejudice. He looks down on Milo for many reasons. Milo is one-quarter Jewish and half foreign the child of a farmer's daughter and an Italian watchmaker. Further, Milo holds a lower socioeconomic standing. Andrew thinks that these characteristics make Milo his inferior. Milo understands the prejudices that people such as Andrew hold. He acknowledges that his father changed his named from Tmdolmi to Tindle when he moved to England; otherwise he would have been branded a dumb immigrant.

Right before he "kills" Milo, Andrew openly denigrates him. Several times he calls him a wop. He refers to his "smarmy, good-looking Latin face" and dubs him "a not one-of-me." When Inspector Doppler comes to "investigate" Milo's "murder," Andrew explains that he was angry that Milo dared have an affair with his wife. It would be all right to lose to a "gent," he claims, who plays by the same rules that is, the English upper-class rules- but not to a "flash crypto Italian lover,"

Style

Detective Story

Sleuth is in part a parody of a detective story and in part a more convoluted mystery. It parodies detective stories in its setting an English country house and its characterization of Andrew a successful mystery writer in the classic style. Andrew takes upon himself the boastful air common to such well-known detectives as Agatha Christie's Monsieur Hercule Poirot, one of those detectives to whom Shaffer dedicates the play. Andrew is proud both of his sales record as a crime wnter, to which he refers numerous times, and of his cunning in putting together the plot to fool Milo. However, Sleuth is also a mystery of another sort Who is the murderer^ Who is a victim1' In fact, who is dead? Andrew revels in such puzzles, but Milo does not, though he is successful at them. At the end of the story, Milo declares, "To put it shortly, the detective story is the normal recreation of snobbish, outdated, hfe-hating, ignoble minds." With or without intention, however, Milo, has taken part in Andrew's detective story. In his determination to avenge himself, he also becomes one of those life-hating snobs he derides. His scorn for Andrew at the end of the play and his belief that Andrew could never shoot him demonstrate this mindset.

Dramatization

Sleuth is a dramatization within a drama The entire first act centers on made-up events, even its very opening, in which Andrew composes his latest mystery novel. The confrontation between Andrew and Milo is a pre-scripted event. Andrew's shooting of Milo is a dramatization Interestingly, the drama that Milo has created holds yet another drama, that of a faked burglary.

The second act is also all dramatization. Within moments of the act's opening, Inspector Doppler Milo in disguise shows up at Andrew's door Doppler/Milo plays out the drama of taking Andrew in for the murder of Milo. Even when Doppler/Milo drops the act, yet another takes its place: that of Milo setting the stage for the next drama in which he makes Andrew believe he has been framed for the murder of Tea. Even after Milo reveals his second deception, Andrew revels in the dramatic act of game playing, proposing that the two men continue The only real moment in the play occurs in the very last seconds, as Andrew shoots Milo and sees the flashing lights of the police car. At last the drama is over.

Twinning

The idea of twinning plays an important part in the construction of the play. Andrew and Milo are the play's only characters, and they are intrinsically linked on many levels. They both share Andrew's wife. In Milo's fantasy, they both share Andrew's mistress. They both are good at game playing Other instances in the text point to their mirror imaging of each other as they take on the role of opposites. At times, such as when Andrew holds

the gun on Milo, Andrew is the aggressor, and Milo is the victim. At other times, such as when Doppler/Milo is about to take Andrew to the police station, the situation is reversed. Additionally, Milo criticizes Andrew for wanting to live in a world where "to be *puzzled* is all." He, in contrast, wants to live "a life where people try to *understand*."

Textual references also refer to the ideas of twinning, doubling, and halving. Milo is half-Italian and his father half-Jewish. The clues that Milo gives Andrew in act 2 contain phrases such as "for any man with half an eye" and "two brothers we are." More obviously, the name that Milo chooses for himself as the Inspector, Doppler, is German for the word *double* and also almost an anagram of the inspector Andrew referred to in act 1, Inspector Plodder, who would easily have been fooled by the faked burglary. The idea of Andrew and Milo being doubles for each other and two halves that form one cohesive whole comes to its culmination at the end of the play. Andrew proposes that Milo stay and live with him so they can continue to play these games in which they are so evenly matched. He refers to them in gentle, lover-like terms: "Two people coming together who have the courage to spend the little time of light between the eternal darkness -joking."

Historical Context

The Downturn of the British Economy

By the mid-1960s, Britain's economic recovery from World War n seemed uncertain. As the 1970s opened, the country faced severe economic problems. Part of the country's problems stemmed from its relatively recent loss of its numerous overseas colonies, which had provided inexpensive raw materials to produce manufactured items, as well as ready markets for these goods. Britain also had failed to keep pace in plant, labor, and managerial practices with more recently industrialized nations. Of the world's industrialized countries, Britain alone experienced declining exports in the 1970s.

Outdated factories, low productivity, and lack of worker interest made it difficult for Britain to compete. The strength of labor unions led to more severe problems. Strikes took place in widespread industries, including utilities, civil services, and mining. Between 1970 and 1972, for example, around 47 million working days were lost to strikes. In 1973, the government banned strikes, but this legislation was ignored.

Unemployment, inflation, and wages were also on the rise. By the middle of the decade, unemployment had reached 1.5 million, exceeding the 2 percent figure with which the government was comfortable. With less money to meet its needs, the government pulled back from major defense commitments overseas, raised taxes, and increased borrowing

Britain Joins the EEC

During the 1960s, British participation in the European Economic Community (EEC) was opposed by the French government, which feared that Britain's ties to the nations of the British Commonwealth and its close relationship with the United States would conflict with membership in the EEC. After lengthy discussion and disputes, Britain entered the EEC in 1973, becoming the organization's ninth member. EEC membership loosened its Commonwealth ties.

The EEC was an intergovernmental organization of fifteen Western European nations. It had its own institutional structures and decision-making framework Its goal was to construct a united Europe through peaceful means and to create conditions for economic growth, social unity, and greater political integration and cooperation among member governments. The EEC eventually included Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. The EEC developed into the European Union in 1993.

British Politics

Two major parties dominated the British political scene throughout the 1970s. The Conservative Party led the government from 1970 through 1974 and again won the elections in 1979; the Labour Party held power in the intervening years. Their conflicting policies contributed to the economic instability. For example, the Conservatives denationalized some British industries, which were then renationalized by the Labour government Both governments, however, maintained the social services of the welfare state.

British Society

In the 1960s the British government had started restricting immigration from Commonwealth countries. In part, this policy reflected the racial tensions afflicting Britain's efforts to absorb a growing non-white minority. In 1971, the government passed the Immigration Act, which greatly changed immigration policy It said that only those people with parents or grandparents born in Britain could automatically emigrate to the country.

Changes also took place in the way people lived. Overall, the working class saw increased standards of living. The upper classes controlled less of the country's private capital.

Critical Overview

Anthony Shaffer's play *Sleuth* was a phenomenal success when it first appeared in the theater world. It opened in London's West End theater district and played for the next eight years. Critics in England and the United States applauded the play's plotting, surprise twists, and unrelenting suspense. British reviewers found it to be an outstanding thriller, comparing it favorably to the works of such mystery masters as Agatha Christie and Alfred Hitchcock.

Upon opening on Broadway, the play received equally rave reviews. Critics and audiences appreciated its mixture of spoof and mystery. In the *New York Times*, Clive Barnes dubbed it "one of the must purely entertaining plays of many a season." He lavishly praised Shaffer's writing as "delicious " and continued, "It has a ponderous frivolity to it that sparkles like golf course sunshine on early-morning corpses." Critics also commented on Shaffer's manipulation of the detective genre. "Although it provides all the suspense and melodramatic devices of a thriller," pointed out Henry Hewes in the *Saturday Review*, "it is new in that it simultaneously spoofs the preposterousness of the form itself." Shaffer won a Tony Award for the play in 1971.

A few years after *Sleuth* first appeared, Jules Glenn analyzed it in regard to twinship. In an article in *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, he wrote about Milo and Andrew's engagement in "an intense ambivalent relationship: extreme hate and profound affection " and suggested that their relationship hinted at a homosexual attraction. Glenn also pointed out the numerous references to halves and doubles in the play.

Ironically, the play was turned down by one British producer who, according to Shaffer, loved it but didn't think a large audience would come to see it. "Once the trick is known, no one will go, so you've rather shot yourself in the foot" Rival producer Michael White did not share this opinion. Since its first production in 1970, *Sleuth* has reappeared on the stage in Britain, the United States, and other countnes around the world countless times.Two years after it first was produced on stage, it also was made into an acclaimed film.

As proof of its enormous success, *Sleuth* has inspired dozens of imitations, such as Ira Levin's *Deathtrap* and Richard Harris's *The Business of Murder*. Gerald M. Berkowitz wrote in *Contemporary Dramatists* that "It is not often that a writer has the opportunity to create a literary fashion and even a new genre, but theatrical thrillers and mysteries can legitimately be divided into *pie-Sleuth* and post-*Sleuth*, indicating more than their date of composition." As Berkowitz points out, Shaffer created the "whodunwhat," a mystery in which "not only the identity of the criminal but the nature of the crime-indeed, the reality and reliability of everything we've seen with our own eyes is part of the mystery."

Berkowitz also acknowledged that *Sleuth* owes some debt to earlier plays and firms, notably *Gaslight* and *Suspicion*, in which it is unclear whether a man is trying to murder his wife, and the French film *Diabolique*, which presents three mam characters who may be the murderers or the victims. However, Berkowitz wrote, "Shaffer concentrates and

multiplies the questions and red herrings, and dresses them in an entertaining mix of psychology ... social comment .. in-jokes ... and black humor. And everything moves so quickly and effortlessly that there is added delight in the author's skill and audacity in so repeatedly confusing us." Such success has its downside. As Shaffer told Matt Wolf of *Variety* in 1997, "It's a blessing and a curse.... It's a blessing perfectly obviously because it has given you a name and a reputation; but it is somewhat of a curse because it condemns you to one genre."

Criticism

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

Critical Essay #1

Korb has a master's degree in English literature and creative writing and has written for a wide variety of educational publishers. In the following essay, she discusses the idea of game playing in Sleuth.

In an interview with Mel Gussow of the *New "York Times*, Anthony Shaffer described his smash play *Sleuth* as "not just a thriller." According to Shaffer,

the subtext is nightmarish The whole idea of people committed to a games situation They're fairly sinister people. If there is a focal point, it's thai if people take fantasy for reality, and act upon it, it must end in disaster.

At the core of this comedy-thriller is the idea of game playing. Indeed, the game of *Sleuth* begins before the curtain even rises. On the program are listed five characters, each played by five different actors. In reality, there are only two characters: Andrew Wyke and Milo Tindle.

Andrew is a logical initiator of the game. A mystery writer by trade, he spends his days creating complex crimes that his hero, St. John Lord Merridew, must puzzle through to their successful conclusion. Even the play's opening demonstrates this aspect, as Andrew rereads the paragraph he has just written in which Merridew explains how a seemingly inexplicable murder was carried out. The segment ends significantly, with the pronouncement. "There, Inspector, that is Merridew's solution.'" This brief section foreshadows Andrew's likening himself to Merridew as the master puzzler.

Andrew is clearly drawn to games, toys, and puzzles of all sons. As the play's stage directions read,
Gumta of all kinds tidtirn the mom, ranging in complexity from chess, draughts and checkers, to early diet and card games ant! even blocking games like Serial and Nine Men Morris. Silling by the window, under the gallery, is a life-sized figure of a Laughing Sailor.

Andrew possesses a large hamper filled with costumes from earlier times, when he and his wife Marguerite "were always dressing up in this house." As Andrew explains. "What with amateur dramatics and masquerades and costume balls, there was virtually no end to the concealment of identity." Further, while pulling the costumes out of the hamper, he annotates them by taking on their characters' voices. Here again Andrew is resorting to game playing, the game of make-believe, which is apt because throughout the play Andrew takes on false identities. The very disguise he chooses for Milo a clown suit complete with enormous shoes- underscores the black humor of the moment and Andrew's sadistic enjoyment of his game.

Such continued references to game playing are sprinkled throughout the play. Though Milo is not a game player, he recognizes this as Andrew's essential character. He disparages a Sherlock Holmes kit and taunts Andrew at the end of the play by telling

him that Marguerite is "fed up with living in Hamley's [a toy store]," The sophisticated game Senat, set up in the room, also is a device that reveals each man's nature. Milo calls it "a child's game" and carelessly picks up one of the pieces, drawing Andrew's response, "It's anything but childish. I can assure you. I've been studying it for months, and I'm still only a novice." Andrew's striving for expertise is thus subtly revealed. Milo's denigration of games, even those that require difficult strategy, also becomes apparent.

Another significant aspect in the brief exchange is Milo's use of language to reflect his distaste for the puzzles and schemes in which Andrew finds his primary delight. This use of language emerges as a pattern in the play. For instance, when Andrew tells Milo about his plan for the "theft" of the jewels, Milo refers to it as a "scummy little plot to defraud the insurance company." Even when Andrew holds the gun and declares his intent to kill Milo, Milo responds, "Oh Jesus! I suppose this is some sort of game." Milo's choice of words indicates thai for him a game can only be child's play. Andrew, however, assents. "Yes. We've been playing it [the game] all evening. It's called 'You're going to die and no-one will suspect murder.'" For Andrew, as already shown, a game can also pose an adult challenge. For Andrew, the game is everything. It is life itself.

In act 2, Milo demonstrates his agility at playing this adult game of Andrew's. He convinces Andrew that he is Inspector Doppler. He deliberately chooses this name to tease and challenge Andrew. *Doppler* is almost an anagram of the imaginary Inspector Plodder, whom Andrew had envisioned investigating the theft of the jewels, and it also is the German word for *double*; Doppler is Milo's double. In Doppler, Milo creates an alter ego who enjoys exacting his revenge through game playing, despite his own assertions that the only reason he chooses to play a game is because he has no alternative. When he went to lodge a report with the police, they did not believe his story. "I felt this terrible anger coming over me," he tells Andrew. "Sol thought of my father, and what I might have done in Italy, and I took my own revenge." This is his explanation for the deception he pulled on Andrew, but he undercuts his reasoning by his summation: "But remember, Andrew, the police might still come." This one sentence shows that Milo understands that the revenge he decided to take was not entirely necessary. And at the end of the play, only a few minutes later, the police do arrive. Had Milo decided to allow the police to exact his revenge, instead of playing his game, he might still be alive.

Faced with Inspector Doppler, Andrew tries to explain what happened. He tells Doppler that Milo, despite his disappearance, was not murdered by him

DOPPLER' Was there a struggle here two nights ago9

ANDREW In a manner of speaking, yes It was a game we were playing

DOPPLER A game? What kind of game?

ANDREW It's rather difficult to explain It's called Burglary

DOPPLER Please don't joke, sir

BOOKRAGS

Doppler/Milo's matter-of-fact response to Andrew's seemingly insensible statement is a reminder that real adults don't play games, and if they do, they don't play games when it comes to serious matters. Doppler/Milo, or most sane adults, could not imagine grownups constructing a game around emotional torture and murder.

Doppler/Milo further pushes the point of Andrew's complete irresponsibility in his game fixation. He notes that Andrew seems to think everything is a game, even marriage. Andrew's response is telling: "Sex is the game with marriage the penalty. Round the board we jog towards each futile anniversary. Pass go. Collect two hundred rows, two hundred silences, two hundred scars in deep places." Such a speech, brief though it is, belies Andrew's assertion that he doesn't care if his wife is having an affair with another man Doppler further notes that torturing a man hardly constitutes a game and accuses Andrew of childlike behavior. But Andrew again has a justification: "I have played games of such complexity that Jung and Einstein would have been honored to have been asked to participate in them." Through his numerous games, he has "achieved leaps of the minds and leaps of the psyche unknown in ordinary human relationships "

In the second tack that Milo plays on Andrew making him find the evidence that would frame him for Tea's murder the playing of the game itself is emphasized The clues that Milo provides for Andrew are riddles that Andrew must first solve. Only then will he find the bracelet, Tea's shoe, and the murder weapon, which offers his only chance to save himself. Milo watches Andrew find the evidence and scathingly points out Andrew's sick interest in game playing. "You're loving it. You're in a high state of brilliance and excitement. The thought that you are playing a game for your life is practically giving you an orgasm."

Andrew only finds release and satisfaction through game. As demonstrated through his marriage, he is unable to form meaningful human relationships. Although Andrew maintains that the reason he has turned his "whole life into one great work of happy invention" is because he is "rather a solitary man," the truth is far sadder. Andrew is alone because of his own emotional bankruptcy Convinced that Milo is "my sort of person" or a "games-playing person," Andrew pleads with Milo to stay with him. "You and I are evenly matched We know what it is to play a game and that's so rare. Two people coming together who have the courage to spend the little time of light between the eternal darkness joking." His subsequent plea, "I just want someone to play with," shows his deeply repressed, abject loneliness.

Milo coldly turns down Andrew's request. Instead he makes fun of the very foundation of Andrew's life, the detective story. After he leaves the room to fetch Marguerite's fur coat, Andrew once again resorts to a game. It is one he has played before, that of holding a gun on Milo the "thief " Milo scoffs at Andrew for that "old burglar game," but he does not understand that Andrew is desperate. He no longer has his game, for his best game was played with Milo, and Milo not only won but also threw in his hand and left the game. Nor does he have anything else, as Milo rightly noted: "you have no life to give anyone only the tricks and shadows of long ago." Milo has crossed the line. Andrew could tolerate Milo's attempts to steal his wife and disparage his masculinity, but now Andrew is at the edge when he says to Milo, "you mock Merridew." This time he shoots

with real bullets. The game is over Milo speaks the play's fitting last words: "Game, set and match!"

Source: Rena Korb, Critical Essay on *Sleuth*, in *Drama for Students*, The Gale Group, 2001

Critical Essay #2

Perkins, an associate professor of English at Prince George's Community College in Maryland, has published articles on several twentieth-century authors. In this essay she examines Anthony Shaffer's innovative reworking of the conventions of the traditional mystery story in his suspenseful play, Sleuth, *in order to project his harsher vision of human nature.*

During the 1920s, mystery stories became extremely popular with the reading public. These works offered readers a stylized form of escapism that encouraged them to believe that even after viewing the devastation of World War I some sense of ultimate order in human experience existed. They found comfort in the detective's abilities to re-estabhsh this sense of order by routing out the evil characters in these fictions and bringing them to justice. Mel Gussow in an article for the *New York Times* notes that in 1970 Anthony Shaffer both parodied and employed traditional murder mystery devices in his award-winning play, *Sleuth* Yet Shaffer's play promotes a more modern sensibility than mystery stories did in the 1920s. His main characters are more complex and sinister, which makes his endings more unsettling. By the end of the play, the audience does not enjoy a sense of order restored. Instead they have gained a glimpse into the darker side of human nature.

The typical mystery story in the 1920s acknowledged the horrors of the past but looked forward to a peaceful future. When these stories focused on a crime, which was usually a murder, they reflected the evil that many readers found in the devastation of World War I. Yet, by sticking to an established structure, mystery writers gave their audiences the assurance that a sense of order would be restored through the actions of the detective, who would provide a rational explanation for what had happened during the course of the story and who would also afford a sense of justice being served.

Critic David Grossvogel finds an example of this model in Agatha Christie's mysteries. He argues that her readers expect her stories to contain "a minor and passing disturbance," while taking comfort in the knowledge that "the disturbance was contained, and that at the end of the story the world they imagined would be continued in its innocence and familiarity."

Francis Gillen in an article on Shaffer for the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, comments that in *Sleuth*, the author "has kept the classic detective story alive... with parody that is at once humorous, affectionate, and often sympathetic to that which it burlesques. Shaffer explains to interviewer Gordon Gow in an article for *Plays and Players*, "I admire the skill of Agatha Christie, and indeed many other writers of that time, John Dickson Carr, Dorothy Sayers." In the interview with Gussow, Shaffer comments that his goal in *Sleuth* was to present a send-up of Agatha Christie and the "cozy crime" genre and "at the same time to use it to have my cake and eat it too."

Shaffer employs several elements of the mystery genre in the play. The action revolves around an incident of betrayal, a common central plot in mystery stories. As Shaffer pits

Andrew Wyke and Milo Tmdle against each other in a battle of wills and wits, he incorporates discoveries, reversals, and, ultimately, the arrival of the police all conventional structural devices in this genre.

Shaffer, however, also makes important changes that produce a nontraditional denouement. Gerald M. Berkowitz, in his overview of Shaffer's works for *Contemporary Dramatists*, notes that in *Sleuth* Shaffer overturns the traditional English country house mystery, "a whodunnit in which a crime is committed and the audience tries to guess which of several suspects is the criminal, while the author carefully directs our suspicions in the wrong directions." Shaffer, he suggests, presents an nontraditional structure in a traditional setting The play takes place in the typical English country house but is structured as a "whodunwhat, where not only the identity of the criminal but the nature of the crime indeed, the reality and reliability of everything we've seen with our own eyes is part of the mystery."

Berkowitz adds that while Shaffer adopts the conventional techniques of the mystery story, he complicates them by multiplying the puzzles and red herrings (misdirections) and "dresses them in an entertaining mix of psychology . . social comment. .. in-jokes... and black humor." Ultimately these techniques highlight the harsher post-war attitudes about the reality of human nature All the characters are found to be guilty of crimes; no one is innocent. The ending therefore becomes ambiguous, for although all the pieces of the puzzle now fit together, readers are left with an unsettling vision of evil. Thus, no true sense of order can be restored.

Shaffer explores the psychological conflict between the two central characters as they each struggle to gain a superior position. They do this through the use of games that initially appear relatively harmless but turn out to be quite lethal. Shaffer explained to Gussow that the play "is not just a thriller, it's serious." He points out that the subtext focusing on two people committed to the playing of games is "nightmarish," suggesting "that if people take fantasy for reality, and act upon it, it must end in disaster." The games become an illustration of the hollowness at the core of each character.

Gillen notes that Andrew uses games "to keep others at a distance in order to hide [his] own emotional bankruptcy . . to disguise his lack of genuine sorrow at losing his wife." He adds that "like the members of a culture glutted with violence or pornography, [Andrew requires] greater and greater extremes to allow [him] to feel at all" Milo notes the childishness of Andrew's game playing after Andrew asks him, "What's so sad about a child playing?" To this Milo responds, "Nothing, sir if you're a child."

Later in the play, Milo notes that Andrew plays games in order to inflict humiliation on others. This becomes Andrew's motivation for the game he plays with Milo. His ultimate goal in his plan to convince Milo to participate in the insurance scam is to try to regain a sense of superiority over Milo after the younger man has stolen his wife. Since he can no longer prove his manhood through his sexual prowess with women, Andrew becomes obsessed with winning the complex tricks he plays on Milo. The younger man notes this unhealthy obsession when he tells Andrew, "The thought that you are playing a game for your life is practically giving you an orgasm." However, Milo becomes caught

up in the same intense desire to beat Andrew at his own game after he loses the first game and feels emasculated His sexual energy is then rechanneled into a new game, whose goal is to destroy Andrew's pride. Yet both men ultimately are destroyed by their monomamacal obsession with winning.

Shaffer employs deception to keep the audience guessing about the real nature of the two mam characters. At first, both appear to be reasonable men who have come together in an adult manner to discuss their relationship with Andrew's wife. Andrew proposes a plan that seems to solve both their problems: Milo's lack of money and Andrew's desire to make sure his wife doesn't come back to him. However, Milo soon discovers that Andrew's generosity is only a mask to cover up his overwhelming need for revenge. Andrew also reveals his racism when he criticizes Milo's Jewish-Italian heritage, since he, as an English gentleman, clearly feels that he is superior to Milo.

After Andrew succeeds m terrorizing Milo to the point where the younger man is pleading for his life, Milo reaches a turning pomt. He now becomes as obsessed as Andrew in his need to take revenge, He explains that at the point when he thought that Andrew was going to Mil him, he "gave himself to death." As a result, he claims,' T ve been tempered by madness. I stand outside and see myself for the first time without responsibility." Now, he insists, "my only duty is to even our score," Thus he toes to emasculate Andrew by telling him that he has strangled the elder man's mistress after she willingly had sex with him.

Traditionally, mysteries present characters who can be judged by the end of the story as clearly good or evil. The good ones discover the true nature of the evil characters and bring them to justice. The despicable character of the murderer becomes evident in his victimization of the innocent. Shaffer both adopts and inverts this plot technique in *Sleuth*. He creates a situation where one character victimizes another. However, as Gillen notes, there is a moment in the play "when the perpetrator and the victim become identical and then exchange roles. Milo becomes as fascinated as Andrew with the game and, like Andrew, is destroyed by it." Although the police do arrive at the end of the play, no sense of order is restored to the audience, since they have been presented with no characters who display a sense of morality as a counter to the imrnorality exhibited by the other characters. Through his clever reworking of the conventions of the mystery genre, Shaffer leaves his audience with the disturbing sense that they have seen human nature at its basest, that even the English, who pride themselves on their honorable character, can be revealed to be truly evil.

Source: Wendy Perkins, Critical Essay on *Sleuth*, in *Drama for Students*, The Gale Group, 2001.

Critical Essay #3

Metzger has a Ph.D., specializing in literature and drama at the University of New Mexico, where she is a lecturer in the English department and an adjunct professor in the University Honors Program. Metzger is also a professional writer and the author of several reference texts on literature. In this essay, she discusses the genre of the modem comedy thriller and the ways in which Sleuth *has subverted the traditional detective play, using both comedy and deception to create a sub-genre of an old literary- staple.*

Shaffer's *Sleuth* could easily be described as a parody of earlier detective plays, such as those by Agatha Christie. When *Sleuth* opened, Christie's *Mousetrap* had been on stage in London for nearly twenty years. In spite of this long run, audiences still returned to see the play again and again. There is a comfort in the familiar, and that is what Christie's work offers. Traditionally, the detective play has come to represent certain tried and true expectations; among these is the certainty that the murder will occur just before the end of the first act, with the second act then devoted to the solving of the whodunit. Before the opening of *Sleuth* in February 1970, audiences could trust in the playwright to follow this pattern. Certain clues were provided, characters and motives were clearly established, and the audience depended on the honesty of the playwright to mislead but not deceive.

With *Sleuth*, however, a new genre was created. The new comedy thrillers subverted all the audience's expectations. The detective play became a game, one in which all the rules were neither clearly established nor explained. In the past, the detective play had provided a game for the audience to solve, but now the play had become the game, with the characters playing games on one another, and, in turn, the playwright playing games with the audience. With the advent of this new theatre genre, solving the whodunit on stage became more challenging and entertaining, as comedic wits and deception replaced tradition. The audience no longer recognized old familiar characters and plot devices, and there were new puzzles to decipher.

Sleuth is all about playing the game and playing it well. Andrew Wyke writes detective fiction, so he sees himself as the consummate game player. He creates characters and situations, giving them implausible scenarios and making them plausible. He reasons that if this can work in his fictional world, it can also help him create the perfect revenge against his wife's lover. But while Andrew is a worthy protagonist, Milo Tindle proves himself to be an admirable adversary. The first act, where the audience might expect the introduction of characters and motives, culminating in a murder, serves as Andrew's opportunity to play the game, with Milo as an unsuspecting victim.

In the second act, Milo recreates the game, and Andrew is thrust into the role of victim. Although Milo is not a willing participant in Andrew's game initially, he easily co-opts the genre and proves he can create a game as worthy as Andrew's. In fact, Milo is so effective that Andrew invites him to stay and continue to play, telling Milo, "Don't go. Don't waste it on Marguerite. She doesn't appreciate you like I do. You and I are evenly

matched " It is the exchange of wits that makes Milo so attractive to Andrew, and it is the wittiness of the game that makes *Sleuth* so attractive to the audience This exchange of wits creates the comedic tone of the comedy thriller and is largely what was missing from much of the earlier detective fiction, where only occasional humor was evident. However, while the audience willingly laughs at many of the exchanges between Andrew and Milo, the murder that ends the play brings an abrupt halt to both comedy and laughter. Although the witty exchanges have served to disarm the audience, the play has always been about murder, with comedy used to replace the traditional clues that were used to entertain the audience.

Much of what makes *Sleuth* a comedy is its serf-conscious parody of its own genre. In"Murderous Games: The Self-Conscious Art of the Comedy Thriller," Marvin Carlson calls *Sleuth* the first fully developed example of a new genre, the comedy thriller that uses a serf-conscious parody of the detective genre and dramatic illusion as a means to recreate the detective genre. The comedy comes from Andrew making fun of himself and of the genre. The dramatic illusion is provided to mislead the audience. There is no cnme to solve because no cnme takes place until the last moments of the final act, but the audience is not aware that no crime has occurred until halfway through the second act In truth, the murder of Milo is almost unexpected. The audience is enjoying the comedy and enjoying the game. The opportunity for murder occurred at the end of act one, with the illusion of murder, and so no one expects murder to occur at the play's conclusion. This is just one more aspect of the parody that the play presents.

Carlson suggests that *Sleuth* even parodies itself, with Andrew using Detective Merrydew, a character that he created, to parody the genre. However, this use of self-conscious parody is not entirely new to drama. The play-withm-a-play has long been a staple of drama. Shakespeare used this device in several plays, most effectively in *Hamlet*, as a means to unmask a murderer. Thus its use by Shaffer not only pays homage to earlier playwrights, but it is an appropriate use, since Shaffer's topic is murder. In *Sleuth*, the audience gets the detective thriller within the detective thnller, and so the genre is recreated yet again.

Within this new genre, the whodunit is the least important aspect of the play. The audience clearly sees whodunit in the final scene. Instead, all that matters is the use of wit and game. Carlson argues that the audience's attention is diverted from "the traditional question of discovering the murderer's identity" and instead is refocused on "complex and ingenious plots designed to provide the reader with continual surprise and mystification." Just as Hamlet helps to rewrite "The Mousetrap" in *Hamlet* as a way to catch his father's murderer, Andrew Wikes rewrites the detective story as a way to plan a murder. Carlson suggests that characters such as Andrew, who apply their "literary skills to real crime," are co-creators of the work, going so far as to assume disguises and to commit fake murders. These characters, then, become actors in their own work, assuming roles to create a fiction or a play that parodies the genre, until in the end, they become the genre and the parody. The line between playwright and character becomes blurred as the character assumes the mantle of creator, parodying the play Wright's role. All of this subterfuge depends on the audience's cooperation. Carlson refers to the

audiences of the new comedy thriller as "accomplices," who must keep the secrets of the plot, refusing to divulge the machinations of the playwright to an unwary public.

In *Deathtraps*, Carlson expands on his discussion of detective fiction to focus on the effectiveness of the comic thriller. In responding to early criticism of *Sleuth*, Carlson insists that the new detective plays are only suggesting a new way to create mystery. The new comedy thriller is no more deceptive than plays by Christie, only the means of telling the story has changed. The murder still occurs at the end of the first act, but in *Sleuth*, the murder is not real. The fake murder becomes a parody of murder that subverts the game. Murders that are not real and detectives that are fake all lead up to a real murder but not at the end of the first act, where the audience would have the treat of witnessing the great detective solve the crime. Instead it occurs at the end of the second act, after the audience has already learned the details and the identities of those involved in the crime. In *Sleuth*, Shaffer creates a new sub-genre of detective fiction that depends on the audience's acceptance of illusion as a substitute for formula. The formula has always been the most comforting aspect of detective fiction.

With a Christie play, such as *The Mousetrap*, the murderer is always the least likely suspect, the one the reader or audience invariably fails to suspect. The playwright has provided all the clues, with no deception on the part of the writer. The audience can solve the crime, if they can read the clues correctly. This does not happen in *Sleuth*, because the clues are not honest. The playwright has deliberately deceived his audience. In traditional detective fiction, part of the appeal is in the reliability of the puzzle. For instance, Christie fans know they can rely on a solution that is plausible and yet one that completely escapes them until the play's conclusion. The least likely suspect is too often the murderer, or is he? It is the solving of that equation that keeps audiences guessing and coming back for more And it is that complexity and familiarity that account for Christie's popularity and longevity among detective story lovers. That there is still an audience for the traditional whodunits is clear, since Christie's play continues to be a staple in London theatres nearly fifty years after its debut.

How then, can the popularity of this new genre be accounted for, the comedy thriller, whose very premise is unpredictability? In part, the answer lies in the play's use of illusion to keep the audience involved. Initially the audience does not recognize that what is occurring on stage is illusion. In fact, it does not become clear until the middle of the second act that all that they have seen on stage is illusion. At that moment, the audience might scramble to find their programs, searching frantically for the names of the actors who are playing Detective Doppler, Detective Sergeant Tarrant, and P. C. Higgs. This frantic search turns up a series of names, but yet these roles are themselves illusions, as are the actors who play them. Carlson refers to this deception as a "direct he in the program" that extends so far as to include fake biographies of actors who do not exist. All this deception is a necessity if the audience is not to be disappointed. Much of the enjoyment in detective fiction is trying to solve the puzzle; if there is no puzzle, there is no purpose in the play Carlson argues that *Sleuth* has made it even more difficult for audiences to trust what they think they know is truth, especially if that truth appears in the program. The audience still expects to see a murder, and they still expect that a crime will be solved, but the evolution of the detective genre has

recreated the ways in which these events occur. Illusion and deception have replaced traditional clues, but the guessing of who will be the victim and who will be the murderer are still essential elements of detective fiction. This aspect of the detective genre is one that the audience expects and in which *Sleuth* does not disappoint.

Part of the humor of the new comic thriller depends, as Carlson suggests, on a sort of self-conscious parody of the genre. That is certainly true, but much of the humor in *Sleuth* also clearly focuses on issues of class. Andrew thinks that Milo is low-class, an immigrant whose father was little more than a shopkeeper, and so he is insulted that his wife prefers this low-class "commoner" to Andrew's own refined elegance. However, while *Sleuth* is a parody of detective fiction, the reality is that the whole genre of detective fiction becomes a parody of British society. In "The Detective Novel of Manners," Carolyn G. Heilbrun maintains that within the detective genre there exists a genre that she refers to as the Detective Novel of Manners (DNOM), in which the very novel is set within a world of "upper-class moral and social principles." This emphasis on social stratification is certainly applicable to detective theater, which also centers itself in this world of "gentry, aristocracy, professional, or upper-middle classes." Heilbrun defines the DNOM as containing "clear class demarcations of English society: prep schools, public schools, university, small villages with their clear, unquestioned social hierarchy, and above all everybody's knowing his or her place." Heilbrun contends that this genre flourished in the period before so many immigrants entered British society and that the genre has disappeared in recent years But in truth, the genre has simply evolved to fit these new circumstances.

Sleuth still embraces this DNOM in the creation of Andrew, that artistic professional who puts class above even his own well-being. However, the character of Milo encompasses that new immigrant class, who poses such a threat to Andrew's concept of social truth that he must be murdered. The British social class, in which everyone knows his or her place, has always been a staple of detective fiction, but in the new comedy thriller, class evolves to include a principle character who is not of the aristocracy and who becomes the de facto hero. Milo. In this respect, Shaffer's new sub-genre deviates even more from the traditional genres than Carlson suggests

With the establishment of a new genre, the audience must first learn all the new rules, recognizing that characters might not be so easily defined and that the playwrights might deliberately have set out to deceive and to subvert Rather than the protagonist uncovering a murderer, the protagonist is the murderer. The audience is always forced to question what they have seen, since they cannot trust a new genre that defines itself by creating illusions. But one thing does remain the same. Although the comedy thriller has thwarted the audience's expectations and subverted the familiar genre of detective theater, the capture of the murderer establishes the play's resolution. The protagonist will not be rewarded for his deeds In spite of its subversion of traditional detective fiction, *Sleuth* fulfills the expectations of detective theater, while creating a new, more complex genre to entertain the audience.

Source: Shen E. Metzger, Critical Essay on *Sleuth,* m *Drama for Students*, The Gale Group, 2001

Adaptations

Andrew Shaffer wrote the screenplay for the 1972 film adaptation of his play. Joseph L. Mankiewicz directed the movie, which starred Laurence Olivier as Andrew Wyke and Michael Caine as Milo Tmdle, both of whom were nominated for Academy Awards for their performances.

Topics for Further Study

Write a newspaper article about Andrew's murder of Milo.

Create your own plot for a play in the *whodunwhat* genre. Write an outline and describe the characters.

The play mentions several characters without physically introducing them What do you think Marguerite is like"? Tea? Write a detailed description of each woman.

Research the psychological ramifications of obsessive game playing and present your findings in a report.

The critic Francis Gillen wrote in *Dictionary of Literary Biography* that *Sleuth* contains many important themes of modern drama: "language as instrument of power, the thin line between illusion and reality, fascination with the idea of death as a release from ordinary human restraint, voyeurism as a substitute for genuine feeling, freedom and its illusions." Respond to this statement.

How does Andrew use game playing to give him a feeling of omnipotence? How does this reflect the true state of his life?

How does Shaffer use language in the play7 What do Andrew's and Milo's choices of words reveal about each character?

Compare and Contrast

1970s: In 1971 the median disposable income per household is £171 per week. Those households in the 90th percentile have £300 pounds to spend per week, while those m the bottom 10th percentile only have £94

1990s: In 1997 the median disposable income per household is £262 per week. Those households in the 90th percentile have £531 pounds to spend per week, while those in the bottom 10th percentile only have £132.

1970s: In 1971, the rate of inflation in Great Britain is 9.46.

1990s: In 1998, the rate of inflation m Great Britain is 3.44

1970s: In 1970, British household expenditures equal close to £238 billion (in 1995 prices).

1990s: In 1998, British household expenditures equal close to £489 billion (in 1995 prices).

1970s: Changing immigration laws lead to decreasing immigration from Commonwealth nations.

1990s: Immigrants from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and South African some 253,000 people come to reside in Britain

1970s: Since the 1950s' high point of a British Jewish population of 450,000, the number of Jews in the country has been in constant decline

1990s: About 350,000 Jews live in Britain, mainly in and around London. This is the second largest Jewish community in Europe.

1970s: The basic rate of tax is between 30 and 35 percent. The highest rate can be as much as 83 percent.

1990s: The basic rate of tax is between 23 and 25 percent. The highest rate is 40 percent.

1970s: The population of Britain in 1971 is close to 56 million.

1990s: The population of Britain in 1998 is close to 60 million.

What Do I Read Next?

Shaffer's follow-up to *Sleuth* (1970) is *Murderer* (1979). This play opens with a thirty-minute silent sequence in which the audience observes a gruesome murder that is not at all what it seems.

Anthony Shaffer and his twin brother co-wrote several mystery novels. The first, *The Woman in the Wardrobe* (1952), appeared under the pseudonym Peter Antony, followed by *Withered Murder* (1955) and *How Doth the Little Crocodile*? (1957). All of these novels make use of classic detective conventions. *How Doth the Little Crocodile*?, like *Sleuth*, contains a staged murder.

Ira Levin's two-act play *Deathtrap* (1979) draws from *Sleuth* m its topsy-turvy plot. It centers on a down-on-his-luck playwright, his wife, and an amateur writer. Precisely who is the victim, murderer, and ultimate victor is unclear until the play's final, suspenseful moments.

Agatha Christie's two-act play *The Mousetrap* (1952) is one of Britain's most successful plays. It ran at its opening theater for twenty-one years and then moved to another theater. The play centers on visitors at a guesthouse, all of whom surprisingly appear to have some connection to a murder that took place at Paddington Station only hours previously.

Further Study

Brown, Allan, Interview with Anthony Shaffer, in *Sunday Times* (London), April 11,1999, p 5

Shaffer and Brown discuss the survival of *Sleuth* on the stage.

Grimley, Terry, Interview with Anthony Shaffer, in *Birmingham Post* (England), May 5,1999, p 15

Shaffer discusses the success of *Sleuth*

Klein, Dennis A, *Peter and Anthony Shaffer*, G K, Hall, 1982

This is a reference guide to Shaffer's work, as well as that of his brother and co-author, Peter,

Sondheim, Stephen, and Anthony Shaffer, "Of Mystery, Murder and Other Delights," in *New York Times*, Vol. 145, March 10,1996, p. 7

In this conversation between Sondheim and Shaffer, the award-winning lyricist and composer and the play wnght discuss the audience for mystery plays and the art of murder.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

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

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

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

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

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

Selection Criteria

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

How Each Entry Is Organized

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

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

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

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

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

Other Features

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

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

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

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

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

Citing Drama for Students

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

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

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

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We Welcome Your Suggestions

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

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