The Sound of a Voice Study Guide

The Sound of a Voice by David Henry Hwang

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Introduction

David Henry Hwang's *The Sound of a Voice* is a tragic story told through the mythic metaphors of Japanese literature. This play is Hwang's attempt to explore some of the deepest, and sometimes contradictory, human emotions. To do so, he created two very lonely middle-aged characters and placed them in an isolated house, almost as if to watch them interact as they simultaneously long for, and repel, the magnetic powers of love. Both his female and his male characters are desperately lonely, but their fear of being psychologically marred by the other keeps them from a final surrender to their emotional needs.

The Sound of a Voice was first produced on a double bill with Hwang's *The House of Sleeping Beauties* by Joseph Papp at the New York Shake-speare Festival Public Theater on November 6, 1983. Both of these plays were a departure for Hwang, who had previously focused on stories about Chinese American immigrants and the problems they faced as they tried to assimilate, or adjust, to life in the United States. Both plays take place somewhere in Japan, and several critics have remarked that the overall theme of *The Sound of a Voice* reminds them of the work of Japanese author Kobo Abe, especially his *Woman in the Dunes,* which was first published as a novel and later adapted to the screen.

The Sound of a Voice is a deeply moving play with a surprising, or, more appropriately, a shocking ending. In the play, Hwang's characters must confront their fears of growing old, of never finding love, and of never being comforted by the intimacy of a long and trusted relationship, all in the short but intense space of one act. To present such emotion in a short span of time, Hwang needed to create a dialogue that is as precise as it is spare, a feat that he accomplished quite successfully. The dramatic impact of this short play is not only deeply felt, but, according to many critics, also very haunting.

Author Biography

David Henry Hwang was born on August 11, 1957, in Los Angeles, California, to his immigrant parents, Henry Yuan, a native of Shanghai, China, and Dorothy (Huang) Hwang, who was born in China but raised in the Philippines. Hwang's mother and father met after immigrating to the United States and while attending the University of Southern California, where his mother studied music and his father majored in business. Although the theme of Chinese ancestry has played an important role in many of Hwang's works, he has said that his ethnicity was not a significant concern as he was growing up.

While attending Stanford University, where he earned a bachelor of arts degree in English in 1979, Hwang became involved in a search of his cultural roots and took an interest in what it meant to be an immigrant. Also, while at Stanford, Hwang wrote his first play, *F.O.B.* ("fresh off the boat"), which was first produced on campus. Hwang's father, who had initially rebuked his son for wanting to be a writer, a profession that Hwang's father felt merited little respect, later praised and encouraged his son after watching the performance of this play. *F.O.B.* was later produced off-Broadway in 1980 and went on to win an OBIE for best new play.

Highlights of Hwang's career include two plays that were written in 1981. Both plays contain Chi-nese immigration themes and were produced in New York—*The Dance and the Railroad* (a Pulitzer Prize finalist) and *Family Devotions*. *Sound and Beauty* (1983), which is the combined title for two one-act plays, *The Sound of a Voice* and *The House of Sleeping Beauties*, takes on a Japanese setting and style, a departure from Hwang's exploration of Chinese identity. Then in 1986, Hwang stepped even further away from his roots with his play *Rich Relations* as he experimented with an all-Cauca-sian cast.

Critics were not very pleased with *Rich Relations*, not because they were disappointed with Hwang's departure from Asian themes but rather for the ordinariness of the play. However, in 1988, with the production of Hwang's *M. Butterfly*, critical appraisal returned as the play won a Tony Award and was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. *M. Butterfly* was inspired by Giacomo Puccini's 1904 opera *Madame Butterfly* and a news story that Hwang read concerning a French diplomat who lived with a Chinese lover whom he thought was a woman but who turned out to be a man. Hwang also went on to write the screenplay for *M. Butterfly* (1993), which starred Jeremy Irons and John Lone. Other screenplays include *Golden Gate* (1994), *The Lost Empire* (2001), a four-hour television miniseries, and, as coauthor, *Possession* (2001).

Hwang is also involved in opera, having written librettos for composer Philip Glass's *1000 Airplanes on the Roof* (1988) and *The Voyage* (1992), and for composer Bright Sheng's *The Silver River* (1997). He also co-authored the song "Solo," which was released on the album *Come* by Prince.

Hwang has served as vice president of Theatre Communications Group, conducted interviews on arts-related topics for the PBS cable television show *Asian American,* and

was appointed to the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities by President Clinton. Hwang is married to actress Kathryn Layng, and the couple have two children, Noah David and Eva Veanne.

Plot Summary

Scene 1

In scene 1 of Hwang's *The Sound of a Voice*, the man character is sitting inside the female character's house. She is serving him tea. She then offers the man food, because she can tell that he has been walking for many days and because she wants to make him feel welcome.

The woman asks the man if he is tired, and he tells her that he slept in the woods the night before, next to a rushing waterfall, which broke the silence. Neither the man nor the woman like silence. She states that she will sleep well if the man stays, because she will hear the sound of his breathing. When asked his name, the man refuses to give her one. The woman, in turn, tells the man that he can call her Yokiko, although she suggests that this is not really her name. The man tells her that she is very kind. The woman tells him that he is very smart.

Scene 2

The man is getting dressed when the woman enters the room. She senses that he is leaving. He has a great distance to travel, he tells her. When she asks where he is going, the man offers vague images without detail, and the woman does not believe him. The woman talks about the care that she gives the flowers. When the man asks what it is that she does, she tells him that it is difficult to put it into words. "It takes hundreds of words to describe a single act of caring," she tells him. Then she asks him to stay "as long as you'd like." She longs for the man's company, and he is attracted to her caring touch, but at the same time, he is also wary of needing her.

Scene 3

The man chops wood, a chore that he particularly enjoys. When the man notices that the woman is staring at his belly, he becomes self-conscious about his lack of body tone and makes fun of his body. The woman reprimands him. She demonstrates how he should care for his body, whether or not it is in good shape. The scene ends with the woman placing her hand on his belly, and the two of them staring into one another's eyes, suggesting the first intimacy between them.

Scene 4

There is no dialogue in this scene. The man is lying on his sleeping mat, in a separate room from the woman. He suddenly lifts his head as if he is straining to hear something. In the background, finally, he hears the soft sound of a musical instrument (a shakuhachi, a Japanese flute), which quickly fades away. He takes out a flower that he

has hidden under his pillow, a flower that he stole from the vase that the woman has since removed from the room. He stares at it. He is drawn to the music, but the flower represents something that scares him. He has heard rumors about other men who have come to this woman's house and have never returned. Although his feelings for her are being aroused, he does not want to be entrapped by this woman.

Scene 5

Scene 5 opens with the man watching the woman scrub the floor. He tells her that he heard her playing music the night before and asks that she play for him. She is shy about her abilities, believing that he will laugh at her because of her unsophisticated tastes in music. Then, she comes across a stain in the floor, one that she has tried for as long as she has lived there to remove. The man goes over and helps her. When he is successful in removing the stain, he states: "We are a team! You and me!" This scene is symbolic of the couple's growing relationship.

The woman suggests that she is ready to play the shakuhachi for him, but she tells him that she usually plays only to please herself, to makes sounds like the human voice to keep herself from being so lonely. In her willingness to play for him, the woman is exposing herself, making herself vulnerable to the man.

Scene 6

There is no dialogue in scene 6. It is nighttime again. The man is sleeping when all of the sudden he hears the woman's music. This time, he hears it more clearly. The woman is playing louder than usual. He stands up and puts his ear to the door of her room and slowly slides the screen open so he can see her. He watches her as she takes care of her flowers, which are spread around her room. She is dressed in a vibrantly colored robe, and the man is amazed at her beauty. He then closes the door and returns to bed.

Scene 7

In the morning, the man is practicing sword maneuvers. It is obvious that he has lost some of his skills. When the woman appears, he tells her that he heard her playing music the night before. She asks if he enjoyed it and then tells him that she wants to play for him every night. He turns her offer against himself, believing that she plays for him so he will fall asleep. This makes him feel like a baby who must be soothed. She tells him to stop making fun of himself. Then she says that she likes to play for him in order to shape his dreams.

The man insists that she become involved in his swordplay and is totally caught off guard when she outmaneuvers him. Her having beaten him makes the woman feel uncomfortable, "undignified." The man encourages her to try again. He is impressed

with her skills. The woman, however, is afraid that her skills make her look too manly. She is concerned that she will not appear attractive because of her strength.

The woman is afraid that the man will now want to leave, because she has embarrassed him with her abilities. She insinuates that she can outmaneuver men in many different ways, and that is what makes them want to leave. She is now afraid that the man will do the same.

The man tells the woman that he has heard rumors that she is a witch and that she imposes curses on men who come to visit her. He tells her that she is beautiful. He is trying to tell her that he came to her house with some preconceived idea, but after living with her, he is beginning to lose his fear of women.

The woman confesses that there have been men who have come to her house with the idea of "killing the witch in the woods." She then realizes that he may have come for the same reason. He confesses that he is still somewhat afraid of her. He claims he hears voices when he looks into the flowers that she tends, insinuating that she has the power to imprison the spirits of the men. He listens to their hum, which he describes in positive terms: "It hums with the peacefulness of one who is completely imprisoned." Here he suggests his fear of the power of love and is afraid of surrendering to his emotions. She, too, is afraid. She tells him that it is not only the man who suffers in love, women also must surrender to it. In the past, when she has done so, the man has left, taking a part of her heart with him. She then declares that if the man has come to kill her, he should do it now, because she cannot stand to have her heart broken again. The man tells her that he would never leave her. The woman says that she believes him.

Scene 8

The woman opens this scene by confessing that she has never cried in her life. She is incapable of releasing the pain that she has endured. She is dressed in a special kimono, one that the man has only seen by peeking into her room at night. She suggests that they might go out that day, maybe just for a walk. She then wants to get something for him, but all he wants to do is practice his sword maneuvers. When she leaves the room, he sits down and places the sword on the floor, with its tip pointing upward, and he rests his chin on it. When the woman returns, she grabs his head and jerks it upward away from the sword, fearing that he will hurt himself.

The man claims that what he was doing was a form of meditation. She tells him it is dangerous. He tells her that she is treating him like a child. He explains the practice, telling her that the friend who taught him this meditation had said that he could "feel the line between this world and the others" when he rested on his sword in this way. His friend told him that if he saw something in one of the other worlds that he liked better, all he had to do was to apply pressure on the sword with his neck, and he would be there. One day, he found his friend dead, with the sword having pierced his throat. He must have found something better, the man tells the woman, or else he had merely made the mistake of having fallen asleep on it.

The woman claims that the man is tormenting her, and yet she tells him if that is how he wants to leave her, she could help him by pushing down on the back of his head. She would then commit suicide so that she could be with him; but then, she tells him to stop this type of meditation. He refuses. She insists; he tells her if she comes any closer, he will drop his head on the sword. She moves slowly toward him, stares into his eyes, then removes the sword, and takes it away.

Scene 9

The woman enters the room and sees that the man is getting ready to leave. She asks if he was just going to sneak out on her like a frightened child. He tells her that he cares about her, but he must leave because she has shamed him. He "came seeking glory," he tells her. She asks if his glory was to be gained by his killing her. He does not directly answer her but does state that he was too weak to kill her and too weak to kill himself. He tells her that she has defeated him. He confesses, obliquely, that he has fallen in love with her, and it is the love that has weakened him, or so he believes.

The woman tells him to kill her, but he cannot. She tells him that she wants him to stay. They could offer one another solace. "The sound of a human voice," the woman claims, is so simple and yet so hard to hold on to. She would rather that the man kills her than be left alone in her house. He responds that she should force him to stay; but she will not do that. She does warn him, however, that he walks on fragile ground. If he were to leave her, it would be as if he had fallen into a deep bottomless crevice. He would spend the rest of his life falling, always fearing when he would hit the bottom. Having been touched by love, she posits, he cannot go back to living as he had in the past.

The woman then leaves the room. The man starts to follow her, then turns around and rushes outside, then turns again, and walks back into the house and slowly toward her room. He opens the door and peers in. Then he returns to the main room and unrolls his sleeping mat. He notices the shakuhachi, picks it up, and blows into it, trying to make a sound. The woman's room then lights up, and the audience sees that she has hung herself. The flowers around her have all been "blown" off, their petals are strewn around the room.

Scene 1

Scene 1 Summary

The play is set in a sparsely furnished room, where the only decoration is a vase of colorful flowers. A Japanese Woman pours tea for a Japanese Man and offers him food. He accepts. As the Woman is out preparing something to eat, the Man takes a flower out of the vase and puts it in his pocket. The Woman returns with food, and as the Man eats and drinks, the conversation reveals that the Woman doesn't have many visitors. She doesn't know when the last one was, and she's glad to hear the sound of a voice. The Man reveals that he is from the city. He is accustomed to a lot of sound, and silence frightens him.

When the Woman says she feels the same way, the Man asks how she can sleep in so quiet a place. She says she will sleep well that night, listening to his breathing. She unrolls a mat for him to sleep on, asking his name. He says he would rather not say, which leads them to joke about how he should be called "Man Who Fears Silence" or "Man Who Fears Women." The Woman says that the latter name is far too common. She says the Man can call her Hanako, adding that that's not her name but simply what he can call her. They bid each other goodnight, and the Man goes out to wash himself. The Woman clears away the dishes and goes out, taking the vase of flowers with her. The Man returns and notices the vase is gone. He prepares to lie down, but he is disturbed by a strange sound. He pulls out his sword, ready to defend himself, but then he realizes the sound is actually a *shakuhatchi,* a kind of Japanese flute. He calms down and sits on the mat, sword at his side.

Scene 1 Analysis

In many aspects of Japanese culture, meaning is implied by small details, brushstrokes in a painting, gestures in a tea ceremony or placement of plants in a bonsai garden. The storytelling technique in this short play is much the same, with every word, every gesture and every detail having significance. That being said, some of the details in this scene are more important than others, such as the way that neither the Man nor the Woman is willing to tell the other his/her real name. This suggests two things. First, both the Man and the Woman may have something to hide, laying the groundwork for the tension that develops between them and the revelation of the Man's purpose. Second, the lack of true names suggests that the play is less the story of a relationship between two individuals than it is a story of the relationship between men and women in general.

The vase, the flowers and the sword are the most important objects in this scene, since all are symbols of their respective owners. This is true in both a visual and philosophic sense - visual, because ownership and therefore relationship are clearly established, and philosophic because there is something very Eastern, very Taoist, in the way that the nature of the symbols relates to the nature of the characters. The vase is made for

receiving things, in a sense making a new and temporary home for water and flowers. This represents the receptiveness of the Woman in making the Man welcome.

At the same time, the flowers represent the Woman's capacity to love and the ageless indestructibility of that love, aspects of her character that become apparent as the action of the play unfolds. She takes the vase and the flowers with her when she goes out. This suggests that she feels a need to protect herself and therefore implies that on some level she fears the Man, an aspect to their relationship that plays a key role later in the action.

The sword is made for destroying things, for demonstrating power. This represents the Man, the power that he demonstrates throughout the play and the way that his presence ultimately destroys the Woman's life. He draws it quickly when he hears a strange sound and rests with it by his side. This suggests that he too feels a need to protect himself and that he fears the Woman. All of this combines to reinforce the idea that this play is ultimately about the relationship between the sexes in general, and specifically the fear and apprehension they have of each other. Finally, the fact that the Man takes a flower from the vase illustrates that he has already become attracted to the Woman and aware of her capacity for love. However, this action also illustrates his destructive powers and foreshadows both the eventual death of the flower and the death of the Woman at the end of the play.

The comments about the name "Man Who Fears Women" indicate important elements of the play. In terms of action, fear plays a key role in the development of the relationship between the Man and the Woman, indicating the thematic importance of the influence that fear has on relationships in general.

Scene 2

Scene 2 Summary

The next morning, the Man prepares to leave. The Woman brings food, and as he eats, she asks where he's going. Their conversation reveals that he's unprepared, or unable, to tell her where he's headed. The Woman brings the vase of flowers in, and the Man observes that flowers like that don't grow nearby. The Woman says that visitors bring them. She takes care of them, and sometimes they last for months. She adds that she creates a world beyond that which the Man can know. She then convinces him to stay.

Scene 2 Analysis

The play never makes it clear whether the Woman notices that there's a flower missing from her vase. The implication of her conversation, which suggests that she takes very good care of the flowers, is that she knows full well that the Man has taken one. For whatever reason, she allows him to believe that she hasn't noticed. At the same time, the Man's reluctance to reveal his destination combines with the Woman's secrecy to suggest that, in spite of the warmth between the two characters, there is an inherent lack of trust between them as well. This again suggests that this play is about the tension between the sexes in general. Finally, the Woman's enigmatic comments about a world that the Man cannot know foreshadow her accusation later in the play that he thinks she's a witch.

Scenes 3 and 4

Scenes 3 and 4 Summary

Scene 3 - The Man has taken off his shirt and is chopping wood. The Woman comes out and thanks him for chopping so much, but the Man says it's a beautiful day in a beautiful setting and that any man could do a lot in such a situation. He then notices that the Woman is staring at his belly, and he makes jokes about its size. The Woman says he shouldn't make jokes, saying that she thinks he looks strong. He tries to go back to chopping wood, but the Woman says there's nothing left for him to chop. She makes him sit down beside her, saying that he should learn to love his belly. He makes more jokes, and then she reaches across and puts her hand on it.

Scene 4 - That night, the Man is asleep. The shakuhatchi plays. The Man gets up and grabs his sword but then realizes again that all he hears is music. He relaxes. He gets out the flower he stole from the vase and looks at it.

Scenes 3 and 4 Analysis

These scenes dramatize the way that the Man and Woman are becoming more aware of each other and what they mean to each other. To the Woman, the Man simultaneously represents great physical strength and a lack of spiritual strength. This is indicated by the way she thinks he disrespects himself. For his part, the Man recognizes that the Woman is a source of beauty and hope, as represented by the music he hears and the flower he holds. The conversation about his belly, culminating in the only moment of non-violent physical contact between them in the play, suggests that they are also becoming aware of each other as sexual, sensual beings. All this combines to increase the sense that the relationship between these two specific individuals is intended to represent the relationship between the two genders in general.

Scenes 5, 6, and 7

Scenes 5, 6, and 7 Summary

Scene 5 - The next morning, the Woman is scrubbing her floor as the Man comes in. He tells her he heard her playing in the night, saying that she should play more loudly and with confidence since her music is so beautiful. He also says she should play for him someday, but she says she thinks he wouldn't like her playing, being from the city. He says he's a fool about music, saying that he'd be unable to answer any question she asks.

The Woman changes the subject, pointing out the stain on her floor she's been trying to get rid of as long as she's lived there. The Man bends down and scrubs hard. He gets rid of the stain and then excitedly congratulates himself. He says he didn't think he could do it and embraces the Woman. After a pause, the Woman asks if he'd like to hear her play. She says that she taught herself to make her music sound like a human voice so she could chase away the silence of the evenings. The Man says that he's there now, and she can listen to his voice. The Woman urges him to speak again, and he says he will.

Scene 6 - That night, the Man again hears the music of the shakuhatchi. Instead of taking out his sword, he looks through one of the screens that make up the walls of the Woman's home and sees her dressed in a beautiful kimono, dancing gently with the vase. He watches a long time, goes back to the mat and takes out the flower he stole earlier. It is now withered and dead. He throws it down, and the music fades into silence.

Scene 7 - The next morning, the Man is outside practicing with his sword. He's out of shape but improves as he continues, eventually slicing an irritating mosquito in two. The Woman comes in, dressed in her normal clothes and carrying the vase, which she places on its shelf. He compliments her on her playing, and she says she'd gladly play for him every night. He says he doesn't want to be soothed like a baby. She says it would give her pleasure to play for him, suggesting that she would enjoy being part of his dreams. She talks about how she usually can't bear her own dreams, but last night she dreamt of him and how he made her laugh.

The Man goes back to practicing with his sword and asks whether the Woman ever handled one. She says she's had to learn to defend herself, and he offers to teach her some more moves. At first she protests, but then she brings two sticks to practice with. He convinces her to pretend to attack him, but when she scores a hit, he tells her to go away and practice on her own. She moves to one side and quickly executes a series of fast, difficult maneuvers. The Man can't believe what he's seen, and the Woman immediately assumes he wants to leave because he thinks she's unwomanly. She delivers a long speech in which she explains that she has many visitors, most of whom want to leave soon after finding out she's not what they think she should be.

The Man says there are rumors around that people who visit the Woman never leave, and he goes on to suggest in poetic language that she traps their souls in the flowers she keeps in the vase. She angrily tells him he's being foolish, saying he's just like all the others who've come to find her and take her love for a trophy they can wear around their waists. She adds that there are people all over the country who have left with pieces of her heart. She urges him to kill her and get it over with. The Man pulls out his sword, but then he stops and says he won't leave her. The Woman says she believes him.

Scenes 5, 6, and 7 Analysis

These three scenes explore the ways that fear plays a role in male/female relationships.

Scene 5 - In this scene, the Woman's fear is at the center of the action. She moves from being afraid of the Man's reaction to playing into a place where she's not only able and willing to play, but able and willing to reveal the reasons for her playing. In other words, because he proves to her that he's prepared to support her by helping her clean the floor, she becomes more able to trust him. The stain, therefore, represents her fear, the sources of which we learn more about in Scene 7.

Scenes 6 and 7 - In these two scenes the Man's fear is the focus. Instead of overcoming it as the Woman did, his fear becomes more intense as he sees in Scene 6 an aspect of the Woman that he never saw before. This unusual vision reminds him of the rumors he speaks about in Scene 7. The flower, which alive symbolized the blooming of attraction between them, at its death symbolizes the end of that attraction and the beginning of fear. The presence of fear is dramatized by the way the Man practices with his sword. His uncertainty increases as more secrets about the Woman are revealed, and the Woman senses his fear and reacts to it with her final speech of the scene.

These scenes create a vivid portrayal of the differences and tensions between the sexes, the different ways that fears manifest and are confronted. The situation becomes more clearly a study of relationships in general. Attraction initially blossoms and is challenged when one person discovers the unexpected in the other. Then the person reacts with either increased vulnerability and trust, as the Woman does at first, or with increased fear and aggression, as the Man does. The final two lines in Scene 7 suggest that it's possible for that fear to be transcended, but the rest of the play suggests that such transcendence may in fact be temporary, falling victim to the human capacity to give in to old fears even after trust has been earned.

Scene 8

Scene 8 Summary

The Woman models a new kimono for the Man, who says she looks beautiful and then starts to practice with his sword. The Woman tries to make plans for going for a walk or for picking flowers, but he's more interested in practicing. The Woman goes out, and the Man practices for a moment longer. He stops, contemplates his sword and then sits with his chin balanced on the sword's sharp end.

The Woman comes back in and is shocked to see him in that position. She tries to convince him to put the sword away, saying it scares her. He explains that a friend of his told him it is a perfect position for developing concentration and meditating. He adds that the friend said that if he ever sees something while he is meditating that he likes better than this world, he should just drop his head. He adds that his friend was found dead with a smile on his face and his sword sticking out the back of his neck. The Woman angrily tells him to stop. He refuses, and she threatens to shove his head down onto his sword. He says she can't get rid of him that easily. She walks over and pulls the sword out from under him. As she takes the sword away, he feels his chin and discovers blood.

Scene 8 Analysis

This scene comes close to being clichy in its portrayal of male/female relationships. The woman wants to do something that appears romantic. The man wants to do something "guy"-ish. The man then does something apparently foolish, and the woman angrily tries to get him to stop. These situations are all traditional, usually comic ways in which the differences between the sexes and their approach to relationships are illustrated. An important difference, however, is that the conflict here centers around the sword, which as has been discussed represents male power in general and the Man's sense of power in particular. The action of this scene, therefore, can be seen as representing the Man attempting to assert his power and the Woman taking that power away. His resentment of what she's done is represented by the blood he discovers, a symbol of his pain. This situation leads directly to his leaving, as shown in the following, final scene.

Scene 9

Scene 9 Summary

The Man comes out with a bundle of his belongings, ready to leave. The Woman comes out and asks him whether he's really going. The Man confesses that he came seeking glory, which the Woman understands to mean that he came to kill her. The Man says he was too weak. The Woman brings him his sword, asking whether he truly meant to leave without it. He takes it, and the Woman asks him to stay. The Man says he can't stay where he's been defeated, but the Woman says she never meant to defeat him, only care for him.

The Man confesses that because she transformed herself and the world in his eyes, he's been defeated. The Woman accuses him of believing what was said about her being a witch and then suggests that he kill her. The Man says he can't, and the Woman asks him again to stay, saying that all she tried to do was make both of them a little less lonely, fill the silence with the sound of a voice. The Man asks her to force him to stay. She says she won't, and he starts to leave. In poetic language, the Woman warns the Man that the ground beneath him is unstable. Unless he's careful he'll fall into a crevasse of loneliness, falling and waiting. The Man goes out. The Woman goes into her house.

After a long moment, the Man returns. He puts down his bundle and picks up the Woman's shakuhatchi. He holds it tightly in his arms and begins to play. As he plays, light illuminates the Woman, hanging dead from a noose. Flower petals fall as her body sways gently, and the Man continues to play.

Scene 9 Analysis

This scene is the climax of the play, the emotionally charged confrontation in which the Man and Woman reveal their true motivations and their true feelings. These revelations come tragically too late for both of them, as the Man's humiliation at the loss of his power and the Woman's desperation at the loss of her source of hope and joy combine to bring about the Woman's death. Her final speech about loneliness implies that her suicide will lead to an even greater defeat and misery for the Man, in spite of the hope inherent in his return. This hope is represented by the way the Man tries to play the shakuhatchi, which as we've seen is a symbol of hope.

Whether the Woman actually is a witch of some kind or whether she just has a poetic soul that sees unusual meanings in flowers and hears unusual voices in both silence and music isn't explained and isn't really the point. The play's thematic bottom line is that because men and women are essentially different, fear of difference is a real danger in every relationship. Differences must be treated with gentleness and respect

rather than bullying or self-preservation in order for trust and joy to be mutually achieved.

Bibliography

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Characters

The Man

The male character is an aging Samurai warrior, who is traveling all over the countryside of Japan. There is no mention of why he is wandering, only that he feels that he must keep moving on. He is very lonely and is also afraid of growing old and losing his skills. It is suggested that he has come to the woman's home to kill her, as the surrounding villagers believe the woman to be a witch who mesmerizes men and entraps their spirits. The villagers would like to be rid of her.

Although the man tries to remain objective about his supposed purpose, he slowly opens his heart to the woman. He becomes somewhat entranced by her music and later by her beauty and her tenderness. Slowly, he changes from being just a visitor to becoming a companion, helping her in her daily chores, enjoying her company. However, when the woman out maneuvers him in swordplay and then later humiliates him by taking his sword away from him while he performs a dangerous meditation, he decides that he can no longer stay with her. When he attempts to leave, however, his emotions pull him back to her home. He returns too late, though, for the woman has committed suicide during his indecision. He then attempts to play the flute, a feat that the woman had mastered. The play ends with the man trying to make a sound come out of the flute, a sound that the woman has referred to as a substitute for the sound of a human voice. The man is unsuccessful. In some ways, by the end of the play, the man is attempting to take over the role of the woman. He attempts to replace her but is unable to do so.

The Woman

The woman is a self-sufficient elder female who lives in the woods alone. She has mastered many skills on her own, except for the ability to keep herself from feeling lonely. She craves the company of a man, someone she can care for. Her love, however, is so strong, and her abilities so advanced, that she scares most men away. When the man appears, she tries one last time to open her heart, to allow him to see her as honestly as she can portray herself. She cannot help being who she is and yet she fears that in totally exposing herself she will once again lose the opportunity to share love with a man.

In the beginning, she is shy. She reveals her true beauty and abilities slowly. She plays out the role of servant to the man, then returns to her private quarters, where she expresses herself more fully but in the privacy of her room. It is in her room that she fully blossoms; eventually, the man gains a glimpse of her beauty. This encourages her to share her feelings with him. However, as she demonstrates her skills and gains confidence in her love of the man, she also humiliates him, unknowingly. She is stronger than he is. She is more skilled. She is also more fragile, having had her heart broken

many times before. In his indecision, the man rebukes her, and she cannot stand it. She would rather die than lose yet another chance to love. In the end, she commits suicide.

Themes

Loneliness and Isolation

Hwang's play *The Sound of a Voice* introduces two characters. First, there is a woman who lives alone in an isolated home in a small country village. Then there is a man, who travels alone throughout the country, a man who has no home. Both the woman and the man share a dislike of solitude. They also share the fear of being hurt by love, which keeps them locked in their separate psychological cages. They are both tremendously lonely, so much so that the man, at one point, sleeps near a waterfall because he has a strong desire to hear the sounds of human voices, and the waterfall is as close as he can come to simulating that sound. The woman, on the other hand, teaches herself to play a Japanese flute, which is the closest she can come to mimicking the human voice. When they meet, they admit their loneliness to one another; but because they have lived so isolated not only from other people but also from their own emotions, the tearing down of the walls they have built to protect their hearts, in the end, destroys them.

Tragic Love

The characters in Hwang's play are both vulnerable to love. They both crave it, and they both fear it. The man is afraid that love will rob him of his powers. The woman is afraid that love will break her heart. The woman, at first, appears to be the more willing of the two to open up to the power of love. However, she has done so in the past, only to have the man of her affections leave her. It takes longer for the man to realize that he loves the woman. He first sees her as unattractive but kind. After staying with her, he finds beauty in her and becomes fascinated with her. However, when her skills in swordsmanship outshine his own, he backs away from her, denying himself any emotional fulfillment. He blames the woman for shaming him. Eventually, he realizes his love and is willing to commit himself to her. Unfortunately, he comes to this conclusion too late. The woman, because she would rather die than have him leave her, becomes confused by the man's indecision and takes her life.

Aging

The woman represents the often overlooked beauty of female middle age. When the man first sees her, he sees only her age. She is also often referred to, by the local villagers, as a witch because she lives alone, is aging, and yet reputedly is still capable of luring men. Since she is not young, people assume that the only way she could possibly attract a man is to place a spell on him. The longer that the man stays at the woman's house, the more appealing she becomes. He begins to appreciate her kindness, her skills, and her femininity. He finds her beauty by truly seeing and appreciating her rather than comparing her to a young woman.

The man, on the other hand, is an aging Samurai swordsman. He makes fun of the fat that has accumulated around his middle. His movements are slower as are his reactions when he sword plays with the woman. He is humiliated and frustrated by his age and his declining abilities. He is shamed by the fact that a mere woman can outmaneuver him. He becomes disgusted with himself and blames woman for having stolen his powers.

Fear of Intimacy

Both the man and the woman have a fear of intimacy. This is demonstrated in many different ways, beginning with their inability to tell one another their true names. The woman's fear differs from the man's, however. She fears that if she allows herself to fall in love again, she will end up having yet another part of her heart taken away from her. She has loved in the past and has been hurt. Although she is afraid, her fear does not stop her from hoping that the man will love her and never leave her. She is able to fantasize about the possibilities of love and yet when she senses that the man is leaving, she feels incapable of surviving yet another defeat. She craves intimacy so much that she would rather die than live any longer without it.

The man fears that if he allows himself to become intimate with the woman, she will entrap him. She will hold him prisoner, as he assumes she has done to every other man who has stopped at her house. The man hears the voices of those men entrapped in the flowers that the woman tends. He does not want to become one of them. He is especially fearful after the woman demonstrates that she is better at swordplay than he is. He also becomes disgruntled when the woman takes away his sword in the midst of a so-called dangerous meditation that could end in the man's death. He decides to leave the woman, despite his acknowledged love for her. When he tries to depart, he discovers that he cannot go. In the last scene, he has overcome his fear. Unfortunately, he has done so too late.

Style

One-Act Play

The Sound of a Voice is a one-act play, consisting of nine short scenes played by only two actors, a man and a woman. The first two scenes introduce the characters. The audience learns that the man is a traveling Samurai swordsman and that the woman lives alone in the woods. Other needed information is passed back and forth, and by the end of the second scene, the woman has invited the man to stay at her home. It is obvious that neither the man nor the woman know one another very well, but through their dialog, the audience senses that they both have needs that they each are hoping the other might satisfy. It is not clear, yet, what those needs are, but dramatic tension begins to build, and the audience's curiosity is aroused simultaneously with the curiosity of the characters as they too explore the possibilities. What do the characters want from one another? How are they imagining they might get what they need? Is it a physical attraction or do their needs go much deeper? This scene is used to draw the audience into the characters lives.

Intimacy begins to brew in scenes 3 through 5, with a continuing rise in dramatic tension. The man takes part in some of the domestic chores, demonstrating the first hints that he is willing to share in the woman's life, that he wants more than just a few hours of physical pleasure. However, the sexual attraction is present, and the couple draws closer to one another physically, as the man bares his chest and then self-consciously makes fun of his girth. The woman touches his bare skin for the first time, as she gently reprimands him for putting down his physical appearance. With this gesture, the the woman suggests a variety of emotions. She is stating that the aging process need not be something that one fears. Rather, one should learn to love the various stages of life, not just youth. She is also saying that the physical is only one aspect of their attraction, and that the need to share goes much deeper. She signals her willingness to take the relationship beyond the physical by sharing her music with the man. Music is sensual, but it also signals a language that goes beyond words to a more spiritual realm. For his part, the man helps the woman remove a stain from her floor, one that she has been trying to get rid of for a long time. This signifies the man's desire to help the woman on a deeper, psychological basis, helping the woman to wipe out a pain she has suffered in the past. By scene 6, which is without dialogue, it is evident that the man and the woman are pursuing something that goes much deeper than lust.

In scene 7, trouble enters the picture, as the woman outmaneuvers the man in sword play. This causes the man shame and makes the woman regret that she may have stepped outside of the boundaries of what a woman is supposed to do. The man is further humiliated in scene eight when the woman takes away his sword while he is in the midst of performing a dangerous meditation. These scenes represent the major challenge the lovers must face. The woman has always been afraid of her powers in terms of her relationships with men. Once she fully exposes her strengths, men walk away from her. She does not try to squeeze herself into the typical, socially described

definition of what a woman should be. She exhibits her strength and intelligence. The man, on the other hand, has been warned of women like her, women who will sap his strength, imprison him. The actions of this scene play into the stereotypical definitions of man and woman. The challenge to the characters is to see if they can lift themselves beyond the social definitions of how a man and a woman should act. They also must redefine love in terms of strength rather than weakness. If they do not succeed, the potential for love will turn to tragedy. This is the height of dramatic tension. Many questions have been answered. The relationship has reached a plateau. The decisions that the woman and the man make will determine whether this is a play of romance or tragedy.

In the final scene, the characters act demonstrate their conclusions. The woman has lost hope. She has opened herself to the man but has become too vulnerable. She has suffered too much loneliness and isolation in the past and cannot bear to suffer any more. She has also misjudged the man, believing that he cannot bear her strengths and is leaving. The man, tragically, has overcome his fear of the woman and his fear of intimacy, but he hesitates, which becomes his fatal flaw. This is a love story, but it ends tragically.

Symbolism

Symbolism abounds in Hwang's play. Of all of the symbols, sound is the most abundant. One of the first is the sound of tea being poured into a cup, which the man refers to as soothing. Later on, he tells the woman that he spent the night at the foot of a waterfall in the woods, which he also found soothing. The sound of water falling is soothing as a substitute for human voices, and the pouring of tea is part of an etiquette ritual that symbolizes companionship. Thus, Hwang is suggesting that the man also finds the woman soothing. These sounds temporarily answer a need for human contact, serving as symbols that incorporate the main theme of the play—the need for love and intimacy. The other obvious sound symbol is that of the shakuhachi, the Japanese flute that the woman plays. She relates it to the sound of the human voice just as the man interprets the sound of the waterfall; when she first plays the flute, she does so very softly. This is symbolic of the woman's fear of truly expressing herself. She is afraid that if she tells the man exactly what she is feeling, she might scare him away. She states that she plays for her own satisfaction and does not know if what she is "saying" with the flute is appropriate.

Another dominant symbol is that of the flowers that the woman tends. They have been put in her care, she tells the man. They have come to her from all over, brought by visitors. When the man investigates the flowers, he believes that he can hear the sound of men's voices inside the flowers, moaning, peacefully so, as if they have been entrapped. The woman keeps the majority of the flowers in her private room, bringing out only a few at a time to place in a vase each day. At night, she takes them back into the room with her. Whether or not the flowers represent actual men is not important. Rather, it is the care that she gives the flowers and the vibrant colors of the flowers that are significant. These attributes of caring and vibrancy might also be observed in her

emotions, in her willingness to love, and the depth and nourishment of that love. At one point, the man secretly takes one of the flowers from the vase and keeps it under his pillow, signifying that he wants a part of her love, despite the fact that he is concerned that he, too, might become entrapped.

Another symbolic act occurs when the woman is scrubbing the floor in scene 5. She comes upon a stain on the floor and tells the man that is has been there ever since she moved in. She has not been able to remove the stain, but the man wants to give it a try. He rubs to a rhythm as he recounts that he is slowly getting rid of it. First, the edges of the stain fade, then he moves "towards the center—to the heart." This stain might represent the sorrow that the woman has felt throughout the years as other men have come and gone, taking a piece of her heart with them. The removal of the stain might be a process of healing for the woman. When the stain is gone, the woman thanks him, and he states: "We are a team!"

Historical Context

Asian American Literature

Until the 1950s, most literature published in the United States that pertained to the Asian experience was written by non-Asian authors. One of the most prominent writers of this genre was Pearl S. Buck, the daughter of Presbyterian missionary workers who were stationed in China. Buck's most famous work was called *The Good Earth* (1931), a Pulitzer Prize-winning novel about a simple Chinese family and their poverty. Buck called on her experiences of living in rural settings in China, pointing out both the need for landownership for economic stability, as well as other social issues such as the low status of Chinese women.

In the 1960s, with old quotas on immigration from Asian countries abandoned, the Asian American population quickly expanded. Then in the 1970s, with the popularity of Maxine Hong Kingston's National Book Critics Circle Award-winning memoir, *Woman Warrior* (1976), interest in the lives and literature of Asian Americans began to blossom. Ten years later, Amy Tan's novel *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) and subsequent movie broadened the scope.

Today there is a national writers' organization devoted to Asian American authors; most colleges offer courses in Asian American studies; and burgeoning sales in literature and memoirs by Asian Americans are encouraging Asian American authors to widen their scopes and offer works not just on the topics of immigration and assimilation but also on themes of love or on everyday occurrences such as those in David Wong Louie's novel *The Barbarians Are Coming* (2000) about a Connecticut ladies' club.

Movies with Asian American Themes

Hwang has stated that many of his childhood images of Asian American models came to him through the movies. Such productions as the Charlie Chan movies, which were made during the 1930s and starred non-Chinese actors in the main role, portrayed a somewhat witty detective who often resorted to the quoting of pithy Chinese proverbs. Although Chan was a likeable character, Dr. Fu Manchu, an evil Asian crime lord created in the 1960s, was not. Hwang has said that he was often embarrassed by these mid-century movie characters.

Movies with Chinese themes took another turn in the 1970s, with the production of martial arts driven movies, especially those starring Bruce Lee, such as his *Enter the Dragon* (1973). Amy Tan's movie, *The Joy Luck Club* (1993), based on her novel, which enjoyed seventy-five weeks on the *New York Times*'s best-selling list, marked a new interest in Asian American people not as stereotypes of themselves but as real people dealing with genuine problems as they adjust to life in the States. Although movies with Chinese themes are still not prolific, the quality of such movies are changing, as

witnessed with the production of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), which went on to win four Academy Awards.

Politics in China during the Mid-Twentieth Century

Hwang's father, Henry Yuan Hwang, left his native Shanghai, China, in the late 1940s, because of the communist takeover of his country. Prior to the communist takeover, parts of China had been controlled by Britain, Portugal, and Japan. After their support of the Allies during World War I, China had been promised that their land would be returned to them; however, it was not. In reaction to the broken promise, about three thousand students held a protest in Tiananmen Square on May 4, 1919, and this event became known as the beginning of the nationalist movement. In 1925, Chiang Kaishek took over the leadership of the fledgling Nationalist Party and began to unify the southern portion of China, massacring communists along the way. One young communist who was able to avoid being murdered was Mao Zadong, who would later become a powerful communist leader. The nationalists were making very successful strides in ridding the country of communists until Japan decided to invade Manchuria in 1937. With this invasion, the nationalist armies had to turn their attention to the Japanese, who were massacring large portions of the Chinese population.

In 1941, after the assault on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese could not long pursue their visions of conquering China, as the U.S. military sought revenge on the Japanese homeland. With the Japanese out of the picture, the Chinese Communist Party regrouped and found that their military strategies were far superior to the nationalists, who had grown undisciplined due to rampant and intractable corruption, which had left the party all but bankrupt. By October 1949, Chiang Kaishek had fled to Taiwan and Mao Zadong had proclaimed the creation of the People's Republic of China on the mainland.

Critical Overview

In a 1983 review of Hwang's double billing, *Sound and Beauty* in which *The Sound of a Voice* was first staged, *New York Times* critic Frank Rich called Hwang "a hugely gifted, Los Angeles-born Chinese-American writer." Although Hwang's career has had its ups and downs, most critics concur that the author of *The Sound of a Voice* has had a great influence on American theater. At one point in his career, many reviewers even referred to Hwang's having been gifted with a Midas touch—everything he wrote was a success.

The Sound of a Voice was somewhat a departure for Hwang, when it first was staged in New York, where it enjoyed a two-month off-Broadway run. His previous works had focused on the plight of Chinese immigrants as they attempted to adapt to their new lives in the United States. "I'm in a state of transition right now," Hwang told a reporter for *People Weekly,* a year following the completion of the first run of this play. He was concerned at that time that he was being categorized as a Chinese-American playwright, so he thought he would write about something a little different than the Chinese-American immigrant experience.

Although Rich did not view the play altogether favorably, he did find the overall atmosphere very "pictorial" and concluded that the play represented "an earnest, considered experiment furthering an exceptional young writer's process of growth."

The play has been staged over the years in small theaters, and in 1994, it was performed in Salt Lake City as part of a celebration of Asian/Pacific American Awareness Week. Linda Sarver, for *Theatre Journal* reviewed the performance, referring to its "sparse and symbol-laden dialogue [that] is elegant in its minimalism." Sarver also commented on the reaction of the audience at the end of the play, which she felt "attested to the effectiveness, beauty, and deep emotion" of Hwang's work.

Criticism

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

Critical Essay #1

Hart has degrees in English literature and creative writing and focuses her published writing on literary themes. In this essay, Hart compares Hwang's characters to the relationship that Kobo Abe develops in his novel The Woman in the Dunes.

Like David Henry Hwang's *The Sound of a Voice*, Kobo Abe, a Nobel Prize-winning Japanese author and dramatist, wrote his classic piece of fiction, *The Woman in the Dunes* in the form of fable. Also like Hwang's play, Abe depicts the tragic relationship between a lonely woman and a solitary man, which ends, like Hwang's, with the male protagonist left alone in the woman's abode. The similarities between Abe's novel and Hwang's Japanese-influenced play have often been noted by critics. The focus of this essay is to explore the relationships between the men and the women in these two works, with an emphasis on the authors' shared theme of entrapment.

Hwang's unnamed male protagonist, a Samurai warrior, wanders throughout the countryside of Japan ready to protect the villages he passes through. On one such venture, he is told about a woman who lives by herself in the woods, a woman whom the villagers believe is a threat because they do not understand her ability to fend for herself, or in other words, to be self-sufficient. Stories abound about this woman, including the fact that she is a witch who captivates men through magic spells. Armed with his sword, the aging Samurai seeks out the woman with the intention of killing her and thus ridding the village of potential harm. This is the opening premise of Hwang's fairytale-like play, whose protagonist is a man seeking adventure. He lives on the road, alone, and happens to be afraid of women.

Abe's novel starts differently. His male protagonist, Niki Jumpei, is a bachelor, a schoolteacher, and a hobbyist who studies insects. During a summer trip to the country, he becomes fascinated with a particular beetle that lives in the sand. Stranded for the night in an isolated village located in the midst of the sand dunes, he accepts an invitation to stay at the home of a young widow. The widow lives in a house that is located in a hole thirty feet deep in the sand. The only means of entering her house is to be let down via a rope ladder.

It is from these two points that the relationships in each story begin to develop. In Hwang's play, the man enters the woman's house willingly, urged on by the villagers. However, his motives for staying are deceptive. He tells the woman that he is lonely and praises her generosity in housing and feeding him. Although he probably truly appreciates her, he is not willing to tell her his name because he does not want to personalize the relationship. He is, after all, there to kill her. In Abe's work, the man also enters the woman's house willingly and also accepts her generosity. He, however, is not aware of the woman's motives for welcoming him. She needs him to survive, for she lives, like her fellow villagers, in a house that would become quickly buried if she did not attend to the daily chore of hauling up the sand. It is a task that she cannot do alone. So when the stranger appears in the village, the local men, similar to the villagers in Hwang's play, realize that they have found a solution to a community problem. Whereas

in *The Sound of a Voice*, the community tricks one of their own (the woman whom they fear is a witch) for the safety of the village, in *The Woman in the Dunes,* the people trick an outsider to help them secure one of the village houses. Abe's protagonist Jumpei has no clue as to what is in store for him. He accepts the invitation to spend the night in the sand dunes without any suspicion of being in danger. He is not a warrior but rather a simple, solitary man who trusts strangers.

Both men are now securely in place as guests in their respective houses. Although the man in Hwang's play enters the woman's house fully aware of his mission, he is quickly caught off guard by his emotions. He admits that he is afraid of women, in general, and especially afraid of this particular woman because of her reputation of entrapping men. He even searches the house for signs of the men who have come before him. However, when he inspects the flowers that the woman cares for, the blossoms that he suspects hold the woman's past suitors, he refers to the supposed imprisoned lovers as being "peaceful." He may fear the woman's powers, but this does not keep him from eventually falling in love with her. He cannot control emotions as she continues to make him comfortable by caring for him. She satisfies him in ways that he is not used to being satisfied. Just as his body is showing signs of softness, so is his heart. If, as he fears, he is being imprisoned, he appears to be beguiled by the proposition. He is free to leave the woman's house at any time, but he does not choose to do so. Instead, he endears himself to the woman, helping her with chores, doing things that she cannot do, working with her and declaring that they are a team.

Abe's male character, meanwhile, soon realizes that he has been tricked. In desperation, he attempts to leave but soon discovers that his efforts are fruitless. The men of the village have removed the rope ladder from above. Without the ladder, his only recourse is to try to climb the walls that surround the house. The harder he tries to scale the sand walls, the more deeply he becomes buried. Whereas the man in Hwang's play is entrapped emotionally, Abe's counterpart is physically imprisoned. Eventually, like the man in *The Sound of a Voice*, Abe's Jumpei volunteers to help the woman of the household complete her chores. His helpfulness is a scheme, however. He does so in an attempt to endear him to her. If she likes him, she may help him escape. His plan for escape is what helps him maintain his sanity in a very frustrating and desperate situation. He helps her excavate the continually falling sand. He bolsters the decaying wood braces of her house. Eventually, he even discovers a way of collecting water to add to their sparse daily ration. They even end up making love, but the encounter is more a result of close and constant physical contact than any emotional connection. The woman cooks and cares for him, but the man in Abe's work cannot help but think that she is stupid to remain in a place that is so inhumane, to spend all the days of her life shoveling sand out of her house.

In contrast, Hwang's male protagonist is humbled by the woman. She is more clever in swordplay than he is, putting him to shame. He is amazed by her ability to play the flute and to create the colorful and robust flowers that fill her room. When he threatens to commit suicide by placing his sword under his chin, he warns her not to come close to him. She does not listen and, instead, walks up to him and takes away his weapon. This humiliates him further. Not only does he not have the courage to kill her, he also is not

strong enough to end his own life. He is afraid that she and his love for her have weakened him. In this state of mind, he decides that his only recourse is to leave her. He discovers, too late, that this is his most fatal mistake. In his indecision, his newfound love, in despair, has taken her life. In an attempt to summon her spirit back to life, he sits down on his sleeping mat and picks up her flute. He tries to make a sound with it, but he cannot.

In *The Woman in the Dunes,* the man tries to escape again. He makes it up the walls only to be caught by the villagers and returned to his sand prison. After a long time passes, he resigns himself to his fate and becomes caught up in the rhythm of the woman's day. He watches how she works, notices the simple patterns of her monotonous routine. He creates his own busy work, setting bird traps, creating scientific experiments on the affects of moisture in the sand. He makes love with the woman; and in the end, she becomes pregnant. It is an ill-fated pregnancy, however, and the woman begins to bleed. A truck appears at the top of the dune, and the woman is taken away. In the excitement, a rope ladder is left dangling over the edge of the wall. It hangs down into the yard around the submerged house. The man takes notice of the ladder and begins to walk toward it; but in knowing that he can escape, he changes his mind. There is, after all, he says, no hurry. He no longer wants to leave. He has his newly discovered catchment system to tend. He wants to perfect it and then tell the other villagers about it. Who would better appreciate it?

Both Hwang's and Abe's works end in similar ways. Both male protagonists are left alone. Both attempt to take up the familiar patterns of their respective women's lives—Hwang's protagonist tries to play the flute as the woman had; Abe's Jumpei has found not only solace but a mild form of excitement in tending the woman's house. By the conclusion of both stories, the entrapment in both men's cases is self-imposed. They have forsaken the roles that they played in their former lives. The search for insects has ended for Jumpei. The travels of the Samurai are over.

Source: Joyce Hart, Critical Essay on *The Sound of a Voice,* in *Drama for Students,* Gale, 2003.

Critical Essay #2

Piano teaches literature and writing at Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta. In the following essay, Piano explores the tensions and misunderstandings that occur between a man and a woman in Hwang's play.

Produced in 1984, the play *The Sound of a Voice* explores the failed attempt by two people to overcome their fears and doubts that they have about each other during a brief encounter. The play takes place in the house of a middle-aged woman, who befriends a stranger travelling through a remote forest in Japan where she lives. Over the course of a few weeks, the two strangers become familiar with each other, yet they continue to treat each other with suspicion. The man fears that he will become emotionally involved and the woman thinks that he will leave like many of the others who have come to the house only to leave her once again isolated in the woods. Both have embedded in their suspicions very traditional views of what men and women are supposed to be like, and it is these ingrained views that prevent them from establishing the intimacy that both of them crave. Through the use of setting, character, dialogue, and symbolism, Hwang highlights not only these characters' fears but also their suspicions about each other. Unfortunately, the characters' inability to trust one another destroys their hopes for finding companionship and instead results in death.

Hwang relies on the narrative pattern of the folk tale as a backdrop to this tragic love story. He does this by creating a timeless setting, providing few clues that would anchor the play in a particular time period. Like many folk tales, the setting is in a forest, a place distinctly separated from the more human activities of the village. In addition, little background information is given to the characters; instead, they exist in a timeless present. The strange circumstances of their meeting is also reflective of many folk tales. It is unclear at first why the man, who remains nameless throughout the play, has come to this remote part of the world. Towards the end of the play, the woman accuses him of coming there to kill her because rumor has it that she is a witch. Similarly, it is also unclear why the woman lives so isolated from other people when she clearly desires human companionship. This ambiguity contributes to the stories the man has heard about her being a witch. Thus, Hwang uses a familiar folk tale character—the witch—to build suspense and mystery in the play.

Suspense is built through both setting and plot devices that convey the woman as a mysterious and seductive woman. The eerie and unsettling atmosphere of the play—its remote setting in the woods, the starkness of the mysterious room—also enhances her ambiguous position while increasing the tensions between the two characters. The man's suspicion that the woman is a witch is based on a number of observations that he makes throughout the play that provide its fantastical qualities: the picked flowers that appear to never die, his observation of her as a young beautiful woman in her room at night, her extraordinary sword maneuvers, and her shakuhachi playing. These various transformations and abilities that the woman has promote an uncompromising portrait of her as having seductive and magical powers. Yet the woman attempts to deconstruct this image by revealing her weakness to him: her dread of being alone. To him, her

solitary lifestyle and her ability to be good at a number of arts reveal her as a very able and independent woman. It is these qualities that unnerve the man and disturb his preconceived notion of femininity, thus reinforcing the rumors that she is a witch.

Thus, despite its folktale qualities, the play explores a very contemporary issue: the inability of men and women to communicate and view each other unguarded and without preconceived ideas. By focusing on gender roles, Hwang attempts to demystify the cultural myths that typify women's and men's roles in many cultures: that women are subservient, dependent, and weak, while men are strong, independent, and self-possessed. Even though the characters in his play are more complicated than these stereotypes, they still cling to these notions. Despite both characters displaying qualities that are typical of their gender, their actions and behavior belie these characteristics. For example, while the woman seems to need companionship and attempts to persuade the man to stay, she makes it very clear to him in the first scene that her loneliness stems not from any inherent quality but from her isolation. The nearest village is a two days walk. For the woman, time is measured not by minutes but by the last time she has heard a human voice. "Anything you say, I will enjoy hearing. It's not even the words. It's the sound of a voice, the way it moves through the air." Thus, it is the isolated setting in a remote forest that contributes to the woman's need to reach out to the man. Her isolation justifies her need to persuade the man to stay with her as a companion.

The woman's declaration of loneliness does not seem to have an impact on the man, and throughout the play, he continues to ignore her attempts to communicate the devastating effects of her isolation. Instead, he perceives her as an extraordinary rather than ordinary woman. She lives alone, cares for beautiful flowers, can play the flute, and also fights with a sword. In fact, it is particularly this last feat that makes him view his own aging body as inadequate. Although they are both middle-aged, she is more agile than he. In fact, her sword-fighting makes him realize that he has assumed her to be a typical middle-aged woman when in fact she is superior to him. After he eggs her on to fight him, he is dismayed when she beats him. Although he is supposed to be the warrior and proudly shows the woman the mosquito that he sliced in half, after being beaten by her, he is amazed and daunted. This amazement only seems to confirm his suspicions of her as a witch. Even as the woman apologizes about her seemingly unfeminine behavior, the man hints at why she is alone when he claims, "There are stories about you. I heard them. They say that your visitors never leave this house." His inability to understand her need for companionship makes him resort to accusations because she is too competent and independent for a woman; thus her attempts to persuade him to see her as otherwise go unheeded.

As with any play, dialogue becomes the primary way of understanding character's hidden motivations and desires. Thus, throughout the play, when the woman tries to communicate her loneliness to him, he misunderstands her. For example, whereas she sees her various talents as a way to pass time and deflect her loneliness, he views them as extraordinary accomplishments that he envies. At the climax of the play when the man finally reveals his intentions for coming to this remote area, he claims, "Sometimes—when I look into the flowers, I think I hear a voice—from inside—a voice beneath the petals. A human voice." His insinuation that the flowers are men who have

been imprisoned by her is a way of expressing his own fear of entrapment and the helplessness that accompanies falling in love.

Even though the man obviously is smitten with the woman, viewing her as being younger than she is and helping her around the house, his fear of being turned into a picked flower is what makes him decide to leave even after he has told her that he would stay. To him, the flowers represent being subdued by the woman since she has the power to decide whether they live or die once they have been picked. In the final scene, as he is leaving, the man tells her, "You changed the shape of your face, the shape of my heart—rearranged everything—created a world where I could do nothing." His feelings of inadequacy surface as he tells her pointedly that in many ways she is the stronger of the two. Her effect on him has been to make him feel powerless and less of a man because she is able to take care of herself. Rather than see the possibility of their relationship as being equal, he sees it as a power struggle, with either one or the other in charge. As it stands, he sees that the woman is in charge both of his feelings and of her life.

The woman views the flowers in a different way; to her, they are representative of her ability to nurture and extend life. The flowers bring her comfort as they allow her to connect with life in an intimate way. She also views the men who have visited not as being captured by her but as taking a part of her with them when they leave. Thus, the flowers may represent the different parts of her that have been taken away and her need to replace what has been lost. The woman is not innocent; she is an aging woman who has experienced disappointment. For this reason, she does not provide a real name when the man asks her, thus contributing to the various levels of deceit that both characters participate in. Likewise, the man steals a flower and watches as it first continues to blossom and die when he spies on her in her room. The flowers represent differing perceptions of love—its possibilities and disappointments.

In this short but complex play, Hwang explores how mistrust, deception, and fear can inhibit people from finding happiness with each other. Despite the obvious affection between the two aging characters, they cannot move beyond their own need to protect themselves to embrace love and understanding. The woman tries to please the man in the ways that are traditional to her gender, such as waiting on him and downplaying her talents rather than take pride in them. The man pretends that he is not emotionally involved with her and that he can leave at any time, yet it is her various abilities that intimidate him and make him feel inadequate. The mistrust that the man and woman have of each other cannot be overcome. Their deception and fears continue to create misunderstanding that ultimately ends in tragedy: the death of the woman.

Because of her intense isolation and alienation from society, the woman has no other choice but to kill herself when the man decides to leave. She can no longer bear the rejection of visitors once they find out what she is really like. Ending on a despondent note, the woman prophesies that the man will suffer a fate worse than death because he has decided to leave. After he discovers her dead, he resumes her position as the main occupant of the house, taking her flute and attempting to play it, but he cannot

play as the woman did. Her death has allowed him to reclaim his power over his feelings, but it has also resulted in the loss of both beauty and love.

Source: Doreen Piano, Critical Essay on *The Sound of a Voice,* in *Drama for Students,* Gale, 2003.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay excerpt, Pattison discusses how Hwang's play is inspired by traditional Japanese mythology and fairy tales. The idea for *The Sound of a Voice* is original to Hwang, but it is inspired by Japanese ghost stories and has the character of a myth or a fairy tale. With "only minor alteration," Hwang suggests in his introduction to *FOB and Other Plays,* "it could be set in a mysterious forest on any continent." A Japanese woman in her forties or fifties lives alone in a secluded forest. Her only joys are her flowers, her *shakuhatchi* (an end-blown bamboo flute), and the occasional visitors she receives. The play opens with the woman receiving a fifty-year-old male visitor. Throughout the early scenes of the play, the couple exchange polite conversation, but when the woman leaves the room, the man investigates the room and its contents, takes a flower from a bouquet in a vase, and listens at the screens, but resumes a restful posture when the woman returns. When they retire for the evening, the woman takes the vase of flowers with her to her room, and the man sits on his mat with a sword at his side. The man prepares to leave in the morning, but the woman convinces him to stay.

Underneath the polite chatter that continues between the two of them runs a counter dialogue of gesture. As the play progresses, the woman continues to wait on the man, guard her flowers, and play the *shakuhatchi* while the man helps the woman with the household chores, ponders his stolen flower, and practices his swordplay. The couple seemingly never sleep; the woman plays her *shakuhatchi* while the man dozes with his sword at his side, jumping awake at the slightest provocation.

The man and woman continue in this torturous dance until, when the woman surprise the man with her skill with the sword, they confess their true situation. The woman is aware of the stories about her that circulate among the surrounding villages: that she a beautiful witch who enchants, seduces, and imprisons her would-be killers. Having heard the stories, the man has come to prove his manhood by surviving her wiles, killing her, and returning to the villages with his story. The woman challenges the man to kill her, but he is unable and promises never to leave her. Then, after a scene in which the man is unable to kill either her or himself, the man is shamed and decides to leave the woman. While she will not force him to stay, she begs him either to stay or to kill her, not to leave her alone:

> I won't force you to do anything. (Pause) All I wanted was an escape—for both of us. The sound of a human voice—the simplest thing to find, and the hardest to hold on to. This house—my loneliness is etched into the walls. Kill me, but don't leave. Even in death, my spirit would rest here and be comforted by your presence.

The woman neither confirms nor denies the gossip about her but only chides the man for his cruelty in believing it. The woman thinks the man is leaving, so she goes to her

room; but the man changes his mind, returns to the front room, moves everything off his mat, including the ever-present sword, and takes up the woman's *shakuhatchi.* As he unsuccessfully attempts to play it, the lights come up behind the screen to reveal that the woman has hung herself. The man obliviously continues his futile task.

One of the main themes of the play is expressed on the first morning of the man's sojourn at the woman's house, as the woman explains that words "are too inefficient. It takes hundreds of words to describe a single act of caring. With hundreds of acts, words become irrelevant." Although she craves "the sound of a voice," the two of them convey the most significant meaning through gesture and action, not dialogue. Scene 3 comically illustrates the contrast between voice and gesture. The man, stripped to the waist, enters the room with a load of chopped wood. Noticing the woman's eyeing of his mid-life paunch, he pats it and begins to joke about his physique. She tries to convince him that he should love his body the way it is, but he continues to hit it as an instrument, talk to it as a companion, and generally belittle its appearance. The scene culminates with the man telling his belly that at least it will be faithful and "never leave me for another man." The woman responds, "No," acknowledging that she will be faithful, even though she was not directly addressed. The man then asks her, "What do you want me to say?" She responds to his request in gesture, leaning over to him and touching his belly with her hand. Like the older woman in *The House of Sleeping Beauties*, she "bewitches" the man, not with enchantment, but with kindness and caring expressed through her actions and gesture Referring to *The House of Sleeping Beauties*, Hwang told Cooperman that "there is the notion of stillness representing a certain amount of passion, a certain amount of need. The emotions that can't really be expressed in an explicit form or can't be understood but only act upon the individual."

Source: Felicia Pattison, "David Henry Hwang," in *Dictionary of Literary Biography,* Vol. 228, *Twentieth-Century American Dramatists, Second Series,* Gale, 2000, pp. 128-43.

Topics for Further Study

The social stigma of suicide (hara-kiri and kamikaze) in Japan differs from that in the United States. Investigate this difference in social customs. What are the historical, philosophical, and social contexts for suicide in Japan? How and why did it become ritualized? What is it about Western attitudes towards death, especially self-inflicted, that differs from the Japanese?

Research the history of the Samurai warriors in Japan. In what period were they most active? What did they represent? Whom did they protect? Were they solitary figures or did they travel in groups? What was their attitude toward women? What kind of training did they undergo? How has the philosophy of the Samurai affected contemporary Japanese society?

Read Hwang's *The House of Sleeping Beauties*, which was often produced with *The Sound of a Voice* as a sort of "sister" play. How are the plays similar? Do the themes compliment one another? Did you gain a more comprehensive understanding of *The Sound of a Voice* by reading the second play?

Compare and Contrast

1980s: Up from 1.5 million in the 1970s, the Asian American population starts out at nearly 3.7 million in 1980, a figure that almost doubled through the remainder of the decade.

Today: The Asian American population is over 10 million people.

1980s: Amy Tan's success with her novel *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) and subsequent movie of the same name popularizes literary works by Asian American authors.

Today: Many prominent Chinese Americans are leaders in the fields of politics, computer technology, medicine, and the arts. Dr. David Ho, *Time* magazine's Man of the Year, is honored for his research into the AIDs epidemic. While in the arts, Yo-Yo Ma enthralls audiences with his ten-time Grammy-winning performances on the cello.

1980s: Mao Zadong's Cultural Revolution is officially proclaimed a catastrophe as China undergoes substantial political reform with Hua Guofeng, a protege of Mao, being replaced as premier by reformist Sichuan party chief Zhao Ziyang.

Today: As unemployment figures soar in China, their officials search for ways to keep tabs on social unrest.

What Do I Read Next?

M. Butterfly, Hwang's most famous play, was published by Plume Books in 1989. The story is about deception in love.

Playing as the other half of a double bill with Hwang's *The Sound of a Voice* was another short play called *The House of Sleeping Beauties,* which Hwang based on a short story by Nobel Prize-winning Japanese author Yasunari Kawabata. Kawabata's story was published in a collection bearing the same title in 1971. Another work by Kawabata that might shine more light on Japanese themes is his *Beauty and Sadness* (1981).

Maxine Hong Kingston is credited with opening up the market for other Chinese American authors with her *Woman Warrior* (1989), a story about the hardships of growing up in California.

For an overview of contemporary Asian Ameri-can authors, Jeffrey Paul Chan has edited a collection of works titled *The Big Aiieeeee: An Anthology of Chinese American and Japanese American Literature* (1991).

Edited by Velina Hasu Houston, *The Politics of Life: Four Plays by Asian American Women* (1993) provides a female perspective of Asian American drama.

The Sound of a Voice is often compared to Kobo Abe's *Woman in the Dunes* (1962), which tells the story of a man trapped in a community of sand-dwellers, who spend their lives trying to stabilize the forever-shifting shapes of their homes. It is also a story about a doomed relationship between a lonely woman and a stranger who happens upon her.

C. Y. Lee's *Flower Drum Song* was recently reissued in 2002 with an introduction written by Hwang. The story concerns a young Chinese American man who struggles to find his identity while living in San Francisco during the first half of the twentieth century.

Further Study

Daidoji, Yuzan, *Code of the Samurai,* Charles E. Tuttle, 1999.

The role of the Samurai warrior in Japanese culture began in ancient times but continues to influence contemporary Japanese culture, politics, family life, and individual personality. This new explanation of the basic code of the Samurai way of life helps Westerners better appreciate Japanese warrior history.

Hanke, Ken, *Charlie Chan at the Movies: History, Filmography, and Criticism,* McFarland, 1989.

Hanke provides an in-depth study of the Charlie Chan movie series, covering the various actors who played the main characters, a synopsis of each film, and other details.

Kawaii, Hayao, and Gerald Donat, eds., *Dreams, Myths, and Fairy Tales in Japan,* Daimon Verlag, 1995.

As *The Sound of a Voice* is based on the form of a Japanese fairy tale, reading this book, which explains the form as well as its meaning in Japanese culture, offers a deeper understanding of the psychological underpinnings of Hwang's play.

Lee, Josephine, ed., *Performing Asian American: Race and Ethnicity on the Contemporary Stage,* Temple University Press, 1997.

Josephine Lee explains the complex social and political issues depicted by Asian American playwrights. Discussed are such plays as David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly,* Frank Chin's *The Chickencoop Chinaman,*

Velina Hasu Houston's *Tea,* Jeannie Barroga's *Walls,* and Wakako Yamauchi's *12-1-a.*

Wong, Sau Ling Cynthia, *Reading Asian American Literature,* Princeton University Press, 1993.

As the field of Asian American literary studies grows, questions inevitably arise about how the works are to be interpreted. Authors whose work is explored include Frank Chin, David Henry Hwang, Maxine Hong Kingston, Joy Kogawa, David Wong Louie, Bharati Mukherjee, Amy Tan, Shawn Wong, and Wakako Yamauchi.

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BOOKRAGS

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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:

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

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

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

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