Spike Heels Study Guide

Spike Heels by Theresa Rebeck

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Introduction

Theresa Rebeck's *Spike Heels* was the first play by this multitalented writer to gain wide notice. Originally staged as a workshop piece by the New York Stage and Film Company at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York, in 1990, the play was first produced in New York at the Second Stage Theatre in 1992. That first production starred the well-known movie actor Kevin Bacon as Edward. The play explores issues of sexual harassment, the control and use of women, self-determination and identity, and changing expectations of men in a feminist era. Its discussion of sexual harassment was particularly timely, coming as it did soon after Anita Hill was hostilely questioned by Congress about her assertions that Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas had harassed her. Although the important New York critics were not universally fond of the play, it was a success in that over the next decade it was produced all over the country. As Rebeck has gone on to fame and recognition as a screenwriter for television and film, the play remains an important early milestone in her career as well as an intelligent examination of issues that are as important today as they were in 1990.

Author Biography

Theresa Rebeck has had success writing for television, film, and the theater. Originally from the Cincinnati, Ohio, area, Rebeck moved to Boston to attend college and graduated from Brandeis University. While writing plays, Rebeck began also to write for television for such shows as *Brooklyn Bridge* and *Dream On* and later for the critically acclaimed show *NYPD Blue*. Rebeck won a Writer's Guild award in 1995 for the *NYPD Blue* episode "Girl Talk." At the same time she was also having success with her screenwriting career, and coauthored the screenplay for the major motion picture version of Louise Fitzhugh's book *Harriet the Spy*. "Theatre, film, and television," she once remarked, "are all modes of storytelling, and many of us are fortunate enough to move freely among them without feeling that we've 'left' or need to 'go back' to one or the other. In fact, if the theatre is to avoid a brain drain, this type of fluidity is increasingly necessary." Because of her versatility, she is an inspiration to many young screenwriters today.

Plot Summary

Act I, Scene 1

Spike Heels opens in Andrew's apartment. Georgie, his neighbor, arrives home from work in a foul mood. She is wearing her work clothes, including a pair of spike-heeled shoes. She changes her clothes in front of Andrew, which makes him uncomfortable. As she complains to Andrew, she lets him know that her boss, Edward, has made unwanted sexual advances to her and threatened to rape her. Andrew gets very angry, and Georgie tries to seduce him, unsuccessfully. When Andrew lets Georgie know that he has informally given Edward permission to pursue her, Georgie gets furious and storms out.

Act I, Scene 2

The second scene also takes place in Andrew's apartment, one day later. Edward arrives unexpectedly, dropping by to see his friend before picking up Georgie for their date, and Andrew lets him know that he is not welcome. Andrew and Edward argue about Edward's conduct toward Georgie. Georgie arrives, dressed provocatively, and Andrew gets Edward to leave for a minute so that he can talk to Georgie. As he tries to remove her spike heels, they kiss passionately. He pulls away. Georgie and Andrew argue about their relationship and Andrew, in anger, lets it slip that he believes that he "made her." Deeply offended and angered, Georgie returns to her apartment to wait for Edward.

Act II, Scene 1

The second act takes place in Georgie's apartment. Scene 1 opens later the same night. Georgie and Edward have returned to her apartment and are making out on the couch. She is attempting to seduce him but he resists, and wants to talk with her about her relationship with Andrew. When she refuses, he becomes insulting and she gets upset. They are interrupted by a pounding on the door: it is Lydia, who is very angry, thinking that Georgie is having an affair with Andrew. Edward leaves, and Lydia and Georgie discuss Lydia's relationship with Andrew, who has just postponed their wedding. They end up dancing with each other but stop when there is a pounding on the door—it is Edward and Andrew. Edward convinces Andrew to tell Georgie he loves her. This upsets both Lydia and Georgie, and the two women leave.

Act II, Scene 2

As the scene opens, the two men are waking up in Georgie's apartment. They continue discussing the events of the previous night and Andrew admits that he and Lydia had slept together while she was still together with Edward. Georgie returns, and after

getting Edward to leave, Andrew expresses his feelings to Georgie again, but she rejects him. Andrew leaves, Edward returns, and the play ends with Georgie and Edward discussing whether they will become involved with each other.

Act 1, Scene 1

Act 1, Scene 1 Summary

The play, *Spike Heels*, takes place in Boston in the present time. The stage is dark, and classical music is playing. Loud, continuous pounding is heard, and the stage is lit. The scene is Andrew's apartment. Georgie is yelling and swearing offstage for Andrew to open his door. She continues yelling, exclaiming that she is going to kill herself, until Andrew opens the door. She storms into Andrew's apartment complaining about her long commute on the T and her uncomfortable high heels. She takes them off as she starts complaining about her boss, Edward, who she threw a pencil at in anger. Andrew offers to massage her feet and does so for a few minutes until it becomes awkward.

Andrew invites Georgie to stay for dinner to meet Lydia, his fiancée, but she refuses because she is too angry and sweaty. He convinces her to stay for awhile and talk until Lydia arrives. Andrew suggests that Georgie change into a T-shirt and pair of shorts of his. While she is in his room changing, Andrew talks to her from the kitchen. He has recently seen Edward and believes that Edward might have a crush on her. She surprises Andrew by walking out of his bedroom in one of Lydia's evening gowns. The dress is made of silk, and Georgie teases Andrew that Lydia must be well off and fancy. Andrew disagrees with her presumptions and begs Georgie to take off Lydia's dress.

Georgie returns in her bra and slip. The two continue talking about the last time Andrew saw Edward. Andrew has to remind Georgie to put her shirt on. Their conversation continues as Georgie takes off her slip and pantyhose. Andrew reminds her that Edward did give her a job, so she should be nice to him. Georgie gets upset at Andrew because she thinks that he is insinuating that she is not qualified for anything. Andrew has to remind Georgie to put the shorts on. They both begin yelling at each other, and Georgie threatens to leave.

Georgie and Andrew stop fighting and apologize to each other. Andrew convinces Georgie to tell him what really happened. She says that Edward came onto her very aggressively. The first time was last week when he asked her to dinner to discuss her future at the firm. Afterward, he asked to come up to her apartment, and she told him that she would like to keep their relationship on a professional level.

Then last night, Edward asked Georgie to stay late. Everyone had gone home, and he told Georgie that the couch in his office folded into a bed. He had gone further by saying that he "...could just rape her." That is when she left. Finally, at work today he asked her stay late and gave her a look. She yelled and threw a pencil at him. Andrew is furious. He attempts to call Edward, but Georgie pulls the telephone cord out of the wall.

The two agree to talk of other things. Then, Georgie asks Andrew what their relationship is. Andrew tells her they have a friendship. Georgie doesn't believe him and tells him they should have sex. She moves in close to him, and they wrestle for a little bit.

Andrew tells her that she would just be repeating a pattern of being poorly used by men if they slept together. People like her, of the lower class, always repeat their mistakes, causing them to end up with unfit partners, bad jobs and undesirable apartments. He finishes his speech by telling Georgie that he is more her teacher than her friend. He wants her to be a better person.

Georgie relents and explains that she just thought they should have sex. She didn't think it was a big deal. She then says that Edward told her that he hit on her because Andrew had told him to. Andrew begins acting very awkward. Georgie asks him what exactly he said to Edward. Andrew denies he said anything at first but then relents. He had thought that Georgie had been developing a crush on him, so he suggested that Edward date her. He did not know that Edward would threaten rape. Georgie becomes extremely upset that Andrew would give her away to Edward. She yells at him for this. She tells him that he was wrong. She does not have a crush. She is in love with him. Georgie storms out of Andrew's apartment.

Act 1, Scene 1 Analysis

During the introduction, or exposition, of *Spike Heels* the reader is introduced to two of the four characters in the play. Georgie's exuberant personality causes the reader to immediately like and sympathize with her character. She is recognized as the protagonist. Andrew is also seen as a protagonist, although secondary to Georgie.

The relationship between Andrew and Georgie is at first indefinable. Andrew's offer to lend Georgie his T-shirt and shorts shows that they are good friends, familiar with each other's apartment and not averse to borrowing each other's clothing. Georgie is very comfortable with her body, whether or not Andrew as a platonic friend, since she walks around in her bra and slip. This is not a normal occurrence between friends of the opposite sex. This scene represents the first emergence of the theme of relationships and the changes that occur in relationships, which is carried throughout the play. There is also the mention of Lydia, Andrew's fiancée, whom Georgie has never met. When Georgie puts on Lydia's dress, it symbolizes that she may have some animosity towards Andrew's fiancée.

When Andrew tells Georgie that she should be grateful to Edward for giving her a job, it signifies several things. Andrew obviously feels as if he is better than Georgie, since he is better educated. He has been trying to better Georgie by lending her books and convincing Edward to hire her. Georgie is offended by Andrew's insistence that he is better than she is and that he befriended her out of a sense of charity. She tries to explain to him that she may not have the education or upbringing that he has, but she is savvy about the world and has the ability to take care of herself. Although she feels that Andrew is wrong, she ultimately defers to him and seeks his advice and approval.

There is rising action in this scene between Georgie and Edward, as Georgie and Andrew's crisis is revealed. Georgie was obviously in crisis both during the incidents with Edward and afterward. Additionally, Andrew is in crisis after Georgie tells him what

happened. He is more outraged than if any of his other friends had been harassed. This is the first time the reader senses that Andrew may feel more toward Georgie than mere friendship.

Georgie questions Andrew's pronounced outrage. Then, Georgie suddenly reverses her opinion of their relationship by suggesting they have sex. This is the second indication that Georgie might feel something for Andrew other than friendship, following her resentment toward Lydia. The suggestion of sex signifies the change of their relationship and the continuation of the theme.

Andrew refuses Georgie, showing that he is uncomfortable in proceeding with a sexual relationship or a change in their relationship. When Georgie reveals that she is in love with Andrew, it signifies an irreversible change in their relationship. If they proceed as friends, the fact that one of them is in love with the other will always be between them. Andrew feels superior to Georgie, and this is confirmed when he chose to offer her to his friend, Edward, as if she were his possession. The way Andrew thinks of Georgie causes the audience to question his status as protagonist.

Act 1, Scene 2

Act 1, Scene 2 Summary

The classical music is darker in the opening of the second scene, which again takes place in Andrew's apartment. He sits with a bottle of scotch in front of him. There is a knock at the door, and Andrew opens it to find Edward. Edward announces that he is in the building to take Georgie out to dinner. He calls her to tell her to meet him downstairs at Andrew's apartment. Edward fixes himself a scotch as he recalls his day. Suddenly Andrew threatens to kill him if he goes near Georgie.

Edward is taken aback by Andrew's sudden threat. They argue over whether or not Edward threatened Georgie. Edward explains that he simply came on to Georgie, and when she refused he got angry. Andrew presses him, asking if he threatened her by saying that he "could just rape her." Edward admits he may have said something to that effect, but it was something he said in the moment that was misinterpreted. He did not mean that he would actually rape her. He points out that obviously Georgie does not feel threatened, since she came back to work and agreed to go out to dinner with him tonight.

Andrew does not want Georgie to go to dinner with Edward. Edward questions Andrew's reasoning for this. He asks Andrew if he is interested in Georgie for himself. Andrew denies that he has feelings for Georgie and points out that he is happily engaged. Edward does not think much of Lydia, since he used to date her. Andrew does not approve of Georgie going back to work for Edward. Andrew announces that he will find Georgie a new job. He believes that if he talks to Georgie, he will convince her to quit working as Edward's secretary.

Just then, Georgie knocks at the door. Edward does not believe that Andrew will prevail, but he agrees to give him fifteen minutes alone to try to convince Georgie to quit her job. This is three times the amount of time it took Edward to convince her to stay. Georgie arrives, and Edward makes an excuse to leave saying that he will run down to the store to buy a bottle of champagne for the three of them to share.

Andrew and Georgie are alone, and he tells her not to work for Edward and not to have dinner with him. Georgie explains that Edward had apologized, promised it would not happen again and offered her a raise of two thousand dollars. How could she refuse? Andrew tells her that he has already looked into finding her another job. Georgie refuses his help, saying that she can take care of herself.

Andrew asks Georgie if she is trying to make him jealous. She answers that she doesn't know. Maybe she is trying to prove something. She is always doing what men tell her to do. She may make a fuss, but in the end she gives in. Andrew asks if he may take off her shoes. Without waiting for a reply, he does so. He leans in and kisses her. Just as the kiss is intensifying, he pulls away. When she reaches for him, he resists. He tells her

that she looks silly in her sexy dress and heels. He tells her she looks obnoxious. Georgie is confused as to why he is suddenly yelling at her when they were just kissing.

Andrew begins telling Georgie that things would never work out between them. He would not be able to take her intensity. He wants calm. Andrew tells her, "You're better than this. I made you better then this." This is the last straw for Georgie, and she picks up her things. He tells her that he cannot take her temper any longer. She is not bettering herself, and he feels like she might go back to her old ways, when she would come home from work drunk and sleep with a lot of different men. He tells her that he is not judging, but since she lives directly above him, he can hear things. Georgie leaves, telling Andrew to give Edward the message that she will be waiting for him upstairs.

Act 1, Scene 2 Analysis

The darker music sets the tone for the second act of *Spike Heels*. Andrew is depressed over how his last conversation with Georgie ended. The audience doesn't know if he is depressed because she yelled at him, calling him on his superior attitude, or whether he is depressed because he knows that his relationship with Georgie will never be the same.

The second scene also introduces Edward. When the audience first learns of Edward's actions toward Georgie, he seems to be an antagonist. His easy mannerisms and the fact that Andrew treats Georgie as inferior cause the audience to recognize that Edward could be a protagonist in the play.

This scene carries through the theme of changing relationships. Georgie and Edward go to dinner as friends, or perhaps even something more, when in the previous scene they were at odds. Andrew, however, does not change his feelings toward Georgie. He kisses her, embarking on a physical relationship, yet he ultimately decides that they should not proceed. He still believes that Georgie is inferior to him because of her lack of education and social upbringing.

Act 2, Scene 1

Act 2, Scene 1 Summary

The audience hears loud music, either Elvis Costello or Prince. The lights go up on Georgie's apartment, which has the same setup as Andrew's but is more cluttered. Georgie has lots of books, even more than Andrew, strewn around her apartment. Edward and Georgie are making out on the couch when he suddenly pulls away. He asks if he can have a drink. Georgie seems confused and offers him scotch. He refuses, saying that he would rather stay in control. He goes to the kitchen to search for tea. He calls back to Georgie, telling her that her apartment is a mess. Georgie starts to get annoyed. She asks him if he has changed his mind about sleeping with her. Edward avoids the question, claiming that he just wanted a cup of tea. He suggests that they just talk.

Andrew's name comes up, and Georgie becomes tense. She does not want to talk about Andrew. Edward gets Georgie to tell him how she met Andrew. She tells him that she met him at the mailboxes in the lobby. He gave her a book to read. She explains that she thought he was a Jehovah's Witness, and she has a soft spot for them. She points out the books she has bought on the subject.

Georgie sums up the story of how she met Andrew and once again asks Edward if he wants to have sex. Edward is stunned by her bluntness. Georgie gives him the ultimatum that they have sex either now or never. They almost kiss, but Edward tells her that if that is the ultimatum, then he will have to say never. Edward does want to sleep with her but not if she is using him to make Andrew feel jealous. He goes on to say that she is just a common woman he wanted to sleep with, nothing more. He knows her type, raised in the middle class, struggling, not doing much to better herself.

Georgie tries to punch Edward, and they struggle briefly. Suddenly, Georgie yells that she cannot see. Just as suddenly, Edward starts calling her sweetheart. He comforts her until she recovers and regains her sight. She starts to feel better, and he apologizes for what he had said about her. She accepts his apology, and they sit together on the couch. Georgie asks him what Lydia is like, and he tells her that they used to date. Edward doesn't care for Lydia much at all. He compares her to Dracula, saying that she is very pale. Georgie starts crying, sad that Andrew is going to marry Lydia, and Edward comforts her. They hug.

There is a knock at the door. Edward opens the door and finds Lydia on the other side. She is yelling at both Georgie and Edward. Edward asks where Andrew is, and Lydia says that he is downstairs. Edward leaves to tend to Andrew, much to the dismay of Georgie, who does not want to be left with Lydia.

Lydia continues yelling at Georgie, telling her that she needs to find a new place to live. Lydia says Georgie is too present in her and Andrew's life. Andrew talks about her all

the time. They hear her moving around upstairs, or she leaves things at Andrew's apartment. Lydia wants Georgie out of their life.

Georgie tries to calm Lydia down and offers her tea. To Georgie's surprise, Lydia prefers scotch. They talk about Edward for a moment before Lydia begins again telling Georgie that she wants her out of their life. Georgie asks why Lydia is even bothering with her, since Lydia feels as if she is better than Georgie. Georgie asks why Lydia doesn't just wait it out until Georgie moves onto something else.

Georgie gives a speech about how a lot of people like Lydia think they are better than she is. True, she grew up poor, moved to the big city and now had a steady job at a law office. Her family really thinks that she made something out of herself, but they don't know that people like Lydia look down on her.

Lydia apologizes. She says that she was really confused and didn't mean what she said. She is about to leave when Georgie invites her to finish her scotch, apologizing to her. Lydia accepts, and they sit and talk. Lydia confesses that she and Andrew have been having problems for some time. They have not had sex in quite awhile. Georgie says that she hasn't been sleeping with anyone either, and Lydia is surprised that Georgie did not have sex with Edward. Lydia comments that Edward must really like her if he has not slept with her already.

Lydia begins crying over Andrew, and Georgie suggests that they dance. She tells Lydia that dancing will cheer them both up. The two slow dance around the room. There is a banging on the door and a struggle outside. Edward charges into the room, dragging Andrew behind him. Edward tries to make Andrew say what he wants to say to Georgie, and they fight. Georgie breaks them up, goes to the kitchen and returns with Diet Pepsi for everyone. She makes everyone drink a Diet Pepsi, saying that it will calm them all down. They all stop fighting and drink soda.

Andrew tells Georgie that he is in love with her. Lydia throws her drink at Andrew and starts yelling. She asks Andrew if he has thought this through. Georgie looks at them all and thanks them sarcastically. She thanks Edward for making Andrew confess his feelings, and she thanks Andrew for making her a better person. She leaves her own apartment, and Lydia follows her.

Act 2, Scene 1 Analysis

The music that is played before Georgie's apartment is revealed reflects her fun-loving spirit. The fact that she has even more books than Andrew shows that, although she does not have a high level of formal education, she is inquisitive and well-read. The relationship between Edward and Georgie is changing, carrying out the overall theme. At first, they are kissing, but it is Edward who pulls away. As he pulls away, he begins to learn more about Georgie. She is messy, well read and has a soft spot for Jehovah's Witnesses. These are facts that Andrew does not even know, even though Georgie and he have been friends for longer than she has known Edward.

As the audience becomes aware of how Andrew and Georgie first met, it is clear that Andrew has always felt superior to Georgie. Their initial encounter sounds like Andrew considered Georgie as a pet project. He wanted to make her a better person. Edward becomes more likable as this scene wears on. He refuses to have sex with Georgie because he feels she is in love with Andrew. He does not want to have sex with her just so she can exercise revenge on Andrew. Edward also asks her personal questions about herself and offers her comfort.

The arrival of Lydia signifies the climax of *Spike Heels*. Each of the four characters is in crisis. Edward is experiencing internal crisis because he is fighting himself as to what is the right thing to do. He chooses to find his friend Andrew and comfort him. Lydia is in crisis because Andrew has told her that he has feelings for Georgie, and she believes they have slept together. Andrew is not in the scene, but from the impression that Lydia gives, it is apparent that he too is in crisis over the fight he has had with Lydia and his unresolved feelings toward Georgie. Lastly, Georgie is experiencing both internal and external conflict. Internally, she is torn over her feelings for Andrew. She has told him that she loves him, but he does not respect her or treat her as his equal. Externally, she is afraid of being alone with Lydia, who is showing her outward contempt. Lydia's arrival signifies a turning point in the relationships of these four characters. This climax, or turning point, foreshadows an ultimate resolution to the crisis that Georgie, Edward, Andrew and Lydia find themselves in.

After Georgie and Lydia are left alone, they realize that they have much in common with each other. They begin an easy camaraderie, opening up the lines of communication. Misinformation on both parts is cleared up. Georgie realizes that Lydia is really in love with Andrew, and Lydia realizes that Georgie has not slept with him. It is revealed that Lydia and Andrew have been having problems for quite awhile. This suggests that Andrew may have begun his relationship with Georgie as a way to distract himself from his problems with his fiancée. He treated Georgie like a project. He felt that he was bettering her by educating her, but in fact he was trying to make her more like Lydia, a better-matched companion for him. He became Georgie's friend for purely selfish reasons.

Act 2, Scene 2

Act 2, Scene 2 Summary

The next morning, the lights go up in Georgie's apartment. Edward is lying on the couch and Andrew on the floor. Andrew wakes up and hits Edward with a pillow. Edward hunts for breakfast. Andrew tries to convince him to leave. He wishes to wait for Georgie by himself. Edward refuses, and the two begin arguing like men who have known each other for some time. Andrew tells Edward that he slept with Lydia before she broke up with him. Edward did not know this. They start fighting and calling each other names. They agree that they have both made mistakes and have acted like jerks.

Georgie arrives. She stayed the night at Lydia's. She is mad to see the two men in her apartment, uninvited. Georgie goes to make tea, and Andrew shoves Edward toward the bathroom. He wants to be alone with Georgie. Andrew tries to kiss her, but she pulls away. Georgie tells him that he should go explain himself to Lydia and hope that she takes him back. Andrew doesn't understand her. He thinks that he and Georgie can work things out and be together. Georgie does not want to work things out. She wants him to go talk to Lydia. Georgie is very firm and finally Andrew leaves.

Edward emerges from the bathroom. He is brushing his teeth with her toothbrush. Georgie tells him that she hopes Andrew goes back to Lydia. She is beginning a friendship with the woman and makes Edward promise not to call her a Dracula anymore. Edward is being very nice, but Georgie asks him to leave because she didn't get much sleep the night before.

As Edward is leaving, he asks Georgie if perhaps they could start something. He assures her that it is all up to her, and he does not want just a one-night stand. She tells him this time she will make the rules and agrees to a kiss. They share a long kiss. Georgie tells him that now they can talk about the next step.

Act 2, Scene 2 Analysis

Upon waking up in Georgie's apartment, Andrew voices his feelings that his relationship with her has already morphed from a platonic friendship to a romantic relationship. He believes that since he voiced his feelings for Georgie, she will simply go along with him. Edward agrees to give them time alone, as he did the previous night. Andrew is Edward's friend, and Edward thinks that Andrew should have a fare chance at convincing Georgie to be with him. Georgie has spent the night at Lydia's, mostly talking about their lives and the situations they have found themselves in with the two men. This shows that their relationship is changing from resentment to friendship.

Georgie does not see Andrew's point of view. She thought she was in love with him, but she is not. She wants someone to love her for herself and not what he could make her into. This act contains the falling action of the plot. Georgie has made a decision. Her

crisis is over, and she is trying to resolve the crisis of Andrew and Lydia. The theme of changing relationships is conveyed through the complete reversal in Georgie and Andrew's relationship. They began as friends, with Andrew being dominant. Then, the possibility of a sexual and romantic relationship appeared, and now Georgie shows her newly found self-confidence and gives advice to Andrew.

Edward is clearly at home in Georgie's apartment. He even uses her toothbrush. Edward gives Georgie the freedom to choose the next step in their relationship, giving her the power. This is what Georgie needs. She had no power in her relationship with Andrew. The relationship between Georgie and Edward has changed greatly, as has each relationship. In this way, the theme of changing relationships is carried throughout the play.

Characters

Andrew

Andrew is a professor of political philosophy at a small college in Boston. He lives alone in an apartment and has befriended his neighbor Georgie, appointing himself her "teacher." He is engaged to be married to Lydia. As the play opens, Andrew is fastidious, cautious, and tends not to take risks. However, during the course of the play he becomes less restrained because of Georgie's influence on him.

Edward

Edward is an old friend of Andrew's. Their personalities are very different, though; Edward is aggressive, extroverted, demanding, and at times a little sleazy. He is a criminal defense lawyer and, as a favor to Andrew, has hired Georgie to be his secretary even though she has not attended college. He dated Andrew's fiancée, Lydia, before Andrew began dating her.

Georgie

Georgie is Andrew's neighbor and Edward's secretary. She comes from a working-class background and has not attended college. She is lusty, earthy, sarcastic, and fatalistic, especially in her relationships with men. Six months before the play begins, Andrew has decided to become her friend and to try to diminish her self-destructive tendencies. In befriending her, Andrew has also tried to "improve" her by giving her books to read and encouraging her to speak more properly. She has responded to Andrew's friendship by falling in love with him.

Lydia

Lydia is Andrew's fiancée and Edward's exgirlfriend. She is from an old, upper-class Boston family. In many ways, she is described as the opposite of Georgie, and the characters talk about her a great deal before she ever actually appears. Edward describes her as cold and unemotional, and Andrew wants to keep her pure, in a way. When she does appear, she is quite fiery, convinced that Georgie is trying to steal Andrew from her. Georgie comes to like her when she sees that Lydia is not the "vampire" Edward has portrayed her to be.

Themes

Power

One of the most important themes of *Spike Heels* is power. Each of the characters has a form of power and attempts to wield it, with results that are not what the character was hoping for. Andrew's power is as a teacher—he is a college professor, and taking the role of the teacher in his relationships is natural to him—and he uses this power to "mold" Georgie into a different person. Although he wants to feel that he is simply helping her, at one point in the play his true feelings come out: "I made you better than that," he tells Georgie. Edward also has power as a lawyer and as a boss, and he uses it crudely in an attempt to get Georgie to sleep with him. Georgie has little power, she feels, and therefore uses her sexual attractiveness (symbolized by her spike heels) and her foul mouth to establish her power. Lydia, the most powerless character of the play, in the outside world would have a great deal of power due to the fact that she is from an old, established family and presumably has a great deal of money.

The irony of the play is that each character's use of power backfires. Andrew wants to establish an enduring relationship with Georgie through his tutoring and, later, wants that relationship to become romantic, but, by laying bare the mechanism of his power over her, he loses her. Edward's use of power—his sexual harassment—backfires, and he must use another form of power (his ability to grant her a raise) to win her back. When Georgie tries to use her sexual power with Andrew and Edward, they both reject her. And Lydia's only exercise of power, her arrival at Georgie's apartment, gains her nothing and may have helped in her losing her fiancée.

Male and Female Roles

At the heart of the play's plot are the differing roles that men and women play in society. In this play, as is often true in society at large, the men have the power and the women are acted upon by that power. Andrew takes the role of the father or teacher figure, directing Georgie's life—telling her what to read, how to talk, even where to work. Edward plays the role of boss and of sexual predator. He is aggressive, insulting, and demanding. By contrast, the women are acted upon. Georgie realizes halfway through the play that Andrew and Edward were treating her like a commodity that they trade between themselves—Andrew gives Edward permission to come on to Georgie, and Edward seems to feel that Andrew's permission is more important than Georgie's interest or even acquiescence. Lydia, as well, is acted upon—like Georgie she is traded between the men, and she is also subject to the approval of her (presumably male-dominated) family.

The genders' differing relations to sexuality are also important themes in *Spike Heels*, and this difference is nowhere better illustrated than in Rebeck's use of the symbol of the spike-heel shoes. At the very beginning of the play, Georgie storms into Andrew's

apartment, complaining about how uncomfortable the shoes are. She argues to Andrew that the only reason women wear such impractical shoes is that they make women's legs more attractive. Yet for all of her feminist consciousness of this, she still wears them because she feels that being sexually attractive is her only way to have power. She must embrace the role of temptress that the shoes give her in order to have any power. Andrew, who wants to remake her and diminish her sexuality, tells her to stop wearing them, but later in the play he admits that he, too, finds the shoes attractive. Lydia also examines the shoes curiously. She does not rely on her sexuality to obtain power, and both disdains and envies women who do. "I guess you don't wear them for comfort," she tells Georgie. "You wear them for other reasons. You wear them because they make your legs look amazing."

Style

Setting

Spike Heels is set in two apartments in contemporary Boston. The play does not make much use of the city; however, Rebeck cleverly structures the play in two parts, and the division is also indicated by the locations of the two acts. The first act is set in Andrew's apartment, the second in Georgie's. As the play examines very carefully some important differences between men and women, setting the two acts in apartments belonging to the two sexes allows the setting to mirror the theme. Rebeck also uses music to contribute to the theme and to reinforce our impressions of the characters, indicating in the text what music should be playing in each apartment—classical in Andrew's, Elvis Costello in Georgie's.

Character Development

The play is in large part about self-discovery and the way that we grow to understand and learn new things about other people, and Rebeck uses the development of her characters to reinforce that theme. With the exception of Georgie, all of the characters in the play are both presented to us and described to us by other characters while they are offstage. We get a very negative impression of Lydia before she ever arrives on the stage—Edward describes her as a vampire—but when she does show up she is much more animated and sympathetic than we suspected she would be. Edward seems like a monster in the first scene, but when he makes his first appearance he is less so (although he is certainly unsympathetic and arrogant). Andrew appears quite sympathetic when he is presented directly to us, but when he is off-stage—when Edward or Lydia is talking to Georgie about him—we learn things about him that are unflattering. Rebeck's use of direct and indirect characterization underscores her point that we cannot make hard and fast judgments about people based solely on how they first appear.

Symbolism

As indicated by the play's title, the most important symbol in the play is Georgie's spike-heeled shoes. The spike heels represent a number of aspects of women's roles in contemporary society—as sex object, sexual predator, working woman, and homebody. As the play opens, Georgie arrives at Andrew's apartment, complaining about how badly her spike heels hurt her. Women on the job, Rebeck indicates, are expected to dress attractively or even in a way that accentuates their sexuality. Men's work clothes hide the body, she suggests; why do women's emphasize their bodies? In addition, women must endure pain to appear professional or attractive. High-heeled shoes, worn consistently over a lifetime, can cause permanent malformation of the foot, and the

spike-heeled shoes (taller and, because of their narrow heels, transmitting more impact to the foot) are especially dangerous for that.

Women are expected to wear high heels to work, but spike-heeled shoes, connoting sexuality, are rarely appropriate for work. So why does Georgie wear them? Georgie is from a working-class family and has little experience with the white-collar world. The fact that she wears these shoes to work indicates her inexperience in the business world. And, as a secretary, she feels powerless. Sexuality has always been her source of power, and the spike heels represent her sexual power—something that Lydia comments on. Georgie uses the spike heels to lure Andrew and Edward, but they limit her, make her just a sexual object. In that sense, when she doffs them—as she does on stage—it emphasizes her powerlessness and her lack of a defined place in the world. But, as she says herself, the spike heels are also an entirely nonsexual way for her to obtain power. "I like the way they make my legs look kind of dangerous," she tells Edward and Andrew. "And I like being tall. I like being able to look you both in the eyes. It's the only chance I get, when I'm wearing these things."

Historical Context

The 1970s were a time of great change for American women. Through the turbulence of the 1960s, women's roles in American society went largely unquestioned. Even the revolutionaries of the period dismissed questions of women's liberation and feminism. But, led by such theorists, writers, and political figures as Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, and Bella Abzug, women in the 1970s began to demand different treatment.

There has been much talk about the "Sexual Revolution" in American society. Although it is very difficult to make generalizations about such a vast transformation of social attitudes, we can confidently say that beginning in the 1920s and lasting into the 1950s a small but increasingly vocal minority of Americans wanted their Puritanical culture to talk frankly about sex. The "carefree" 1920s were characterized by groups of young people who had much different attitudes toward sex than did any generation in American history—for the first time, sex was being regarded not simply as a dirty secret for married people to keep but as a recreational activity. In the 1950s, a decade whose image today is dominated by middle-class American values, the movie star Marilyn Monroe and the magazine publisher Hugh Hefner, among many others, forced America to confront its hypocrisy about sexuality. And in the 1960s, the various countercultural groups of young people often made sexual liberation or "free love" part of their program.

But for all of the changes in American attitudes toward sex, American attitudes towards women had changed little. This "Sexual Revolution" often made women into sexual objects, existing only for the pleasure of promiscuous men. Even the invention of the birth control pill, which allowed women to experiment sexually without fear of pregnancy, was a mixed blessing for women in some ways. Tired of the disdainful attitude toward women demonstrated by the self-described radicals of the 1960s, Friedan and Steinem organized a women's movement that sought to secure equal treatment for women in society. One of the most difficult problems this movement faced was how to fight for the sexual freedom of women without seeming to make women into "tramps" or "sluts." There was no model in Western culture for the woman who was in control of her own sexuality; as Steinem often pointed out, Western women were inevitably portrayed as virgins, whores, or mothers, with no other roles available to them.

American society spent much of the 1970s and 1980s debating the question of women's liberation. What were appropriate roles for women at home? In the workplace? How should a woman use her sexuality? By the early 1990s, most jobs and careers were open to women, although a "glass ceiling" often existed that effectively prevented women from advancing to executive positions in government or business. An especially thorny and enduring problem was sexual harassment, or unwanted sexual advances at work, especially those made by a male superior to a female employee. Many men dismissed the issue, but the legal scholar Catherine MacKinnon—mentioned by Edward in *Spike Heels*-helped draft legislation to define such conduct and make it illegal.

In 1991, many women's frustrations about sexual harassment came to the fore in the so-called "Anita Hill case." President Bush had nominated Judge Clarence Thomas to serve on the Supreme Court, and, during his confirmation process in the United States Senate, a lawyer who had worked under Thomas, Anita Hill, accused the judge of sexually harassing her during the time they worked together. The stories Hill told of Thomas's behavior were very familiar to millions of women, but the Senators questioning her in the hearings concentrated instead on Hill's sexual history, her conduct, even her clothes. The Senators' obliviousness to the seriousness and pervasiveness of sexual harassment in many women's lives, and their tendency to "blame the victim," caused those women to conclude publicly that "they [the Senators specifically, but in a larger sense men in general] just don't get it."

Rebeck draws on women's problematic, expanded sexual freedom and on the issue of sexual harassment in her play. Georgie uses her sexuality as a way to establish power, but her sexuality apparently backfires. In the play, though, we see that Edward and Andrew have been treating her like a commodity, almost as if they have traded her—something they have done before—for Lydia. The thorny issues of sexual harassment, women's liberation, and changing gender roles are at the heart of *Spike Heels*.

Critical Overview

Theresa Rebeck's play *Spike Heels*, exploring issues of love, gender roles, sex, and sexual harassment, did not receive great reviews when it was initially produced but has since been produced to acclaim all over the country. When the play was first staged in New York in 1992, Rebeck was already known in the New York theatre world for her one-act plays, but *Spike Heels* was her biggest success to date.

In the world of contemporary American theatre, the most important city is New York. Although many plays have their initial productions in small theatres around the country, it is not until they are produced in New York that they are taken seriously. And as befits New York's central place in theatre, the theatre critics for the city's most influential daily newspaper, the *New York Times*, have become America's leading theatre critics. Frank Rich, at that time the paper's head critic, could make or break a play by his review.

Rich attended the 1992 staging of *Spike Heels*, starring Kevin Bacon, and was unimpressed. He saw the play as a modernization of the "glossy Hollywood comedies of the unabashedly sexist 1950s" in which the men, not the women, are "virgins and tramps. The idea is wicked and promising." But, Rich felt, "the play is a letdown." Rich found the dialogue excessively profane, writing that "the lines that are not funny frequently try to get by on scatological bombast." The play was too heavyhanded, he continues: "When really stuck, the playwright takes to pounding in her points. There is too much talk about how men view women as property, or want to be in control of every situation, or try to pass themselves off as sensitive even as they are being manipulative."

When the play was staged the following year in Boston, the *Globe's* critic Louise Kennedy was similarly unimpressed, but for different reasons. The play's cardinal sin, for Kennedy, is that for a comedy, it just is not funny. "It just isn't any fun," she gripes. "Every character . . . is unbelievably annoying. The actors are not well-served by the script's ridiculous plot twists and implausible shifts in character." Kennedy also felt that in this ostensibly feminist-minded play, Rebeck undermined her own feminist principles. "Maybe it's hysterical to have a woman threatened with rape by her boss, then turn around and go out to dinner with him to make his best friend jealous, then declare her love for the best friend, then have a fleeting bonding session with the friend's fiancée, then windup going back to the harassing snake. If it really does sound fun to you, go anyway—maybe you can tell me what I'm missing."

Similarly negative was Alvin Klein, who reviewed a Stamford, Connecticut, production in the *New York Times* in 1993. "In case the audience doesn't figure out that *Spike Heels* is a contemporary, multicultural *Pygmalion* knockoff, don't worry; one is bopped over the head with that allusion. There is more he says-she says attitudinizing here than an organized forum on the gender wars can accommodate, but hardly enough wit, balance, sense of craft or coherence to sustain a play." Klein also disliked what he saw as the ultimately antifeminist contradiction of the play, writing that Georgie's success at the end is really a "Pyrrhic victory . . . back to square one."

Later reviewers in other cities were more enthusiastic. Reviewing the Victory Theatre's production of *Spike Heels* in Burbank, California, Madeleine Shaner of *Backstage* wrote that the "delightfully fresh play is like a sip of sparkling champagne after a steady diet of city water . . . funny, touching, crazy, unpredictable, and as insightful as it is entertaining." In 1994, Nelson Pressley of the *Washington Times* compared the play with Shaw's *Pygmalion,*, calling it "Shavian with blue language" and praising the play's "wry characters and nervy, earthy dialogue." "Miss Rebeck is a writer to watch," he concludes.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4

Critical Essay #1

Barnhisel holds a Ph.D. in American literature. In the following essay, he discusses the structure of the play and how that structure relates to and helps construct its themes of gender relations.

Theresa Rebeck's play *Spike Heels* is a humorous meditation on contemporary gender roles and romantic relationships. It explores feminism, sexual harassment in the workplace, the teacher-student relationship, and even social class. Some of its critics have taken the play to task for undermining its own feminist message or simply for not being funny. Whatever its shortcomings, though, *Spike Heels* boasts a sophisticated structure that Rebeck expertly uses to reinforce the themes of the play.

Rebeck's play does an effective job of anatomizing and questioning gender roles and the easy dualisms into which we divide the world. Although it does rely perhaps too heavily on stock characters, it is an interesting, and at times even funny, updating of Bernard Shaw's famous story.

Rebeck structures her play as a complex of dualities. Everything works in opposed pairs that are turned upside down or switched at some point before or during the play's action. Most obvious of the pairs are the two sexes. Although there is no transsexuality (i.e., nobody actually switches genders), one of the attributes that the play gives to the characters does get switched: at the start of the play, the two males are friends and the two females rivals, but by the end, Andrew and Edward are fighting and rivals for Georgie, while Georgie and Lydia strike up a friendship and their rivalry disappears when Georgie rejects Andrew.

The roles that the genders are supposed to play are also implicated in this complex of dualities. The male characters, Andrew and Edward, represent two poles of stereotypical male behavior. Andrew is the teacher, the father figure, but he is also almost utterly asexual. When Georgie returns from work at the opening of the play, she quickly sheds her clothes, walking out to the front room in only her underwear, but Andrew shows no temptation, even when she makes it clear to him that she would like to have sex with him. In a way, he is slightly feminized (at least in relation to Edward) because of his passivity and even by his choice of drinks—tea or zinfandel, as opposed to the Scotch the rest of the characters drink. He also wants her to minimize her own sexuality; "you're making a spectacle of yourself," he tells her. He is dry and pretentious, dropping names of philosophers like Hegel and Nietzsche and quoting James Joyce —"history is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake"—when discussing Georgie's personal problems. Yet even though he is not an aggressive male in the way that Edward is, he is still stereotypically male in the way that he attempts to control Georgie. He is "remaking" her, much like the professor of George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion*. But Georgie resists: "I'm confused, but I do know that I don't want to be the person you keep trying to make me."

Edward, by contrast, is the young wolf, the tomcat, the aggressive male. He is an outspoken lawyer, an obnoxious "snake," as one of the play's reviewers calls him, and a sexual predator. But he, also, has his identity undermined over the course of the story. When Georgie comes on to him, he refuses her. The playwright seems to be suggesting that Edward can only be sexual when he is the aggressor—Lydia's statement that "he always wants it," when taken with Edward's description of Lydia as cold and passive, reinforces this. Frank Rich, of the *New York Times*, felt that Rebeck was reacting to, and reversing, the "glossy Hollywood comedies of the unabashedly sexist 1950s" in which women are always "virgins and tramps." This would be yet another example of Rebeck's transformed dualisms—Andrew as the virgin who leaves his fiancée for the exciting and dangerous woman from another social class, Edward as the tramp who in the end acts like the virgin.

Given Rich's formulation, the women would have to then be respectable, if boring, suitors and rakish, rebellious, earthy interlopers. At first glance, this is exactly what they are. Lydia is almost a stock character when described by Edward and Andrew—the character of Lilith from the television show *Cheers* is an example of this type—and Georgie is, as well. But when Lydia arrives she is warmer, more fiery and emotional than we would have suspected. Georgie, the character who is at the center of the play, transcends her stereotypical role, as well. The women, who are traditionally under the control of men, gain control in this play to some extent. In the end, nobody is in control: the end of the play is a negotiation. As Georgie says, "it's always about what you guys want. And I'm just like some thing just spinning in the middle of it all. I can't even think, you know?"

The women also embody the class dualisms common in American drama in stock ways. Lydia, the upper-class woman, is initially portrayed as dry, cold, and condescending. Georgie fears her because she represents the qualities that she feels Andrew is trying to cultivate in her, and when she mockingly tries on Lydia's dress Andrew gets very upset—he resents the way she is undercutting the distinction between the two women. Georgie is figured as working class in many ways: she is profane and crude, she is sexually loose, she is street-smart but not (yet) book-smart, she is aggressive and extroverted. Both men comment dismissively and insultingly on her working-class upbringing, also.

The relationships around which the play revolves are also structured as a series of amorphous dualities. The play encompasses numerous kinds of emotional relationships. There is a relationship that definitely existed in the past and definitely ended then: Lydia and Edward. There is a relationship that could have existed in the past but definitely ends during the play: Georgie and Andrew. There is a relationship that definitely existed in the past and may end during the play: Lydia and Andrew. There is a relationship that does not exist during the play but may in the future: Georgie and Edward. There is a relationship that existed in the past and will continue to exist in the future: Andrew and Edward. There is even a relationship that is merely suggested, even though it neither existed in past nor will exist in the future: Lydia and Georgie, who are friendly and even dance "erotically" until the fighting men enter Georgie's apartment.

The play captures these relationships at a point at which they are being transformed in ways that also transform the people involved. During the course of the 36 hours of the play, an engagement ends, two people admit their unrequited love for another, a sexual Lothario finds his sex drive absent, and one long-term friendship is severely tested. The dualisms of the play extend to its setting. The play takes place in two apartments in the same building, apartments that are, in the words of the stage directions, "identical . . . but in all particulars different." The apartments share the same space but they are distinguished from each other by music, degree of mess, and appearance of lived-in comfort.

But in the end, for all of the shifting identities and roles that the characters take on during the play, at the end the situation really changes very little. Georgie's last scene, in which she rejects Andrew and "negotiates" the terms of a potential relationship with Edward, is clearly intended to show her coming into "ownership" of her life. Ironically, Andrew may have succeeded in remaking her, for at this point she is more in control than at any other point in the play. But the resolution is troubling, even if it does show Georgie coming into her own. The viewers or readers question Georgie perhaps more than the playwright does&mdashwhat is this woman doing, getting involved with a man who threatened to rape her? Yes, she is intending to do this on her own terms, but the issue (of rape and sexual harassment) brought up earlier is so serious, and tossed away so flippantly, that we question if the playwright is simply wrapping things up artificially. Edward tells her that he is not the "enemy," but this is unconvincing. He is still a jerk, an arrogant grasper who has threatened her—and who is, let us not forget, still her boss.

Rebeck's play does an effective job of anatomizing and questioning gender roles and the easy dualisms into which we divide the world. Although it does rely perhaps too heavily on stock characters, it is an interesting, and at times even funny, updating of Bernard Shaw's famous story. But for all of its feminist overtones, it does not really transcend the gender roles of the Hollywood comedies to which Frank Rich alludes. Yes, at first the men do play the traditionally female roles—but the end of the play brings us back to the old model, in which a rakish man gets the girl and the frigid woman is quickly and patly written off. Perhaps this is just another overturned dualism, in which Rebeck at first plays with but ultimately reaffirms the gender roles of Hollywood and the pre-feminist United States.

Source: Greg Barnhisel, in an essay for *Drama for Students*, Gale Group, 2001.

Critical Essay #2

*Hamilton is an English teacher at Cary Academy, an innovative private school in Cary, North Carolina. In the following essay, she discusses "power feminism" and Rebeck's*Spike Heels.

In his essay "Power and Knowledge," Michel Foucault wrote, "What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse." Foucault means that power, even dominant power, is not bad, but actually enticing. Recent feminists have adopted the Foucaultian idea of power as both attractive and compatible with pleasure, in a new form of feminism called "power feminism." The term "power feminism" was coined by Naomi Wolf, who offers it as a healthy alternative to the "victim feminism" that focuses on paternalistic oppression and denies women's sexuality. Victim feminism concerns itself with retribution against oppressive males, and victim feminists act militant by effacing their femininity. Wolf is applauded by Camille Paglia, the outrageously outspoken academic who calls herself the "Feminist Fatale," whose shocking book *Sexual Personae* (1990) led many erstwhile feminists to revamp their beliefs. With Paglia, many contemporary feminists no longer find sexiness incompatible with power, or with feminist thinking. Paglia considers the nineties to be a time of "feminist reform." In the shifting arena of gender politics, every woman must come to terms with her own sense of sexuality and the ways in which she interacts with men. Theresa Rebeck's play *Spike Heels* showcases one woman grappling with issues of beauty, intelligence, and sexuality in the post-women's-movement era. Her play explores the confusion that surrounds sexual relations as young women negotiate a new brand of feminism, one that embraces sexuality and feminine attractiveness, as well as power.

The play's title, *Spike Heels*, portends an attitude toward the bondage of style that women endure in the interest of pleasing and enticing men. In this regard, the play manifests "victim feminism," which finds fault with the trappings of the cultural oppression of women. The uncomfortable spike heel shoes, Andrew tells Georgie, "look like some sort of medieval torture device." However, in the next breath he says that wearing them has put her "in a bad mood." Thus, on one hand Andrew seems enlightened (in "victim feminist" terms) in his view that women should not abuse their bodies to look attractive; but on the other hand, his trivialization of her distress as "a bad mood" marks him as hopelessly chauvinistic. A feminist of the 1970s or 1980s would find fault with Andrew for his apparent insincerity. He further condemns himself by his paternalistic attitude toward her. Georgie suffers from social and gender bondage, according to Andrew. Georgie discovers that he has made a "pygmalion" project of her, hoping through books and conversation to transform her street-wise smarts to sophisticated intellectualism. "I am your teacher," he tells her. He wishes she were calm; "there's no peace in you," he complains, and he adds, "I made you better than this." He wants to raise her up from her lower class life, where she "came home drunk after every shift sleeping with every guy who looked at you." He presents his re-make project as social philanthropy, but he expects her to make herself a tabula rasa for his ideas.

Georgie resents this. It does not take book learning for her to recognize that his project is not an altruistic one; "this is about sex!" she exclaims as she departs for her rendezvous with Edward. She objects to his usurping her own authority, and retaliates by enticing Edward to sleep with her, to make Andrew jealous, "to teach you something for a change, you could learn from me." Tired of being "in the receiver's position," she takes control over her own body and mind. She also does so without feeling compromised by her body, and without the necessity of denying the power of her feminine sexuality. Her tactic is ultimately successful, as it breaks Andrew out of his reformer's mode and puts him on her level.

Both social and the sexual issues are played out over the spike heels. Andrew begs her to let him take off the heels she wears for the date with Edward. Andrew thinks they look "sad and ridiculous," but Edward says "it's perfectly delightful" that they let her look men in the eye. The question becomes, are the spike heels a form of gender bondage imposed by men, or are they an equalizing weapon Georgie can use so that her "legs look kind of dangerous"? For Georgie, the shoes express the new feminism, that allows her to use her feminine beauty in the service of achieving equality with men. As Camille Paglia summed it up in a 1997 essay, "Since Madonna, younger women no longer feel that makeup and sexy outfits are incompatible with feminism." Georgie wants to wear the spike heels to entice and thereby regain control with Edward. She succeeds with him through a combination of powerful attractiveness and giving in. She returns to clean out her desk and then submits to his authority in a public showdown when he demands that she come to his office. "It's like this dare it's like this f—ing dare, and everyone goes real quiet, just waiting to see what I'm gonna do," Georgie tells Andrew. As a reward for giving in, Edward gives her a $2,000 raise and makes a dinner date. To Andrew, accepting a date with someone who threatened to rape her is absurd. But she is using Edward as a pawn in her game with Andrew. The power of the spike heels, combined with the knowledge that she is using him, proves emasculating for Edward, however. After dinner, in her apartment, he suddenly withdraws from their embrace and engages in a series of power struggles with her: over her loud music (which he turns down), over what to drink (tea and not scotch), over making love (the ultimate power struggle). Edward objects to Georgie's lack of "subtlety," because he prefers to take the role of aggressor. He desperately seeks control, washing her dishes, using her toothbrush. In his attempt to recover the dominant position, he refuses to go when she tells him to leave. He tells Andrew, "This woman makes Godzilla look like a Barbie doll." Rather it is the reverse. A Barbie doll has taken on the power of Godzilla, and is in the process of deciding whether to use it for destruction or for good in the gender wars.

Critical Essay #3

The spike heels figure in the final scene, when Georgie brandishes them as a weapon. Though to Edward they are "delightful," he leaves it up to Georgie whether she keeps them. "Do whatever you want," he tells her about the shoes, and regarding their relationship, he defers too: "I accept your terms." He has "gone through" a lot of women, as Andrew reminds him. Edward is the male, profligate Mary Magdalene to her Christ, a male prostitute reformed by her truth. Her endorsement of the Jehovah's Witnesses as "nerdy," with a message of "Resurrection" that is "nice," is not accidental, nor is the fact that she offers their books to Edward. She is a prophet—of the new sexuality. Andrew massages her feet, in the ritual stance of a disciple towards his master, but she decides to "negotiate" a relationship with Edward, who never had a civilizing mission for her and who accepts her terms.

Women's relations with other women are also affected by the new feminism. Georgie adopts Lydia into her sisterhood. But because Lydia is a "vampire," one who (symbolically) drinks blood, she must be transformed. First Lydia drinks Georgie's scotch, thus replacing blood with the drink that breaks down social barriers. Now she is open to change. Next, Lydia tries on the spike heels. While wearing them, the women discover another connection besides loving Andrew: through Edward, who used to date Lydia. Georgie chastises Lydia for feeling superior to people like herself, from a lower class, saying "shame on you." When the two dance together, they discover a mutual eroticism that is not lesbian, but rather an appreciation of feminine sexuality. They nearly decide not to let the men in when they knock. Georgie is tired of "spinning" around trying to be what men want. The victim feminists bonded through mutual resentment against men. Power feminists share that bond, plus the bond of appreciating each other sexually. It is not that competition does not exist between women, any more than it does for men, as evidenced by Andrew and Edward's relationship.

This new generation of women are both threatening and enticing to men. The threat is partially because these women resist pygmalion makeovers, but it also consists in a confusing form of feminine power, power that entices. This power is as enticing and confusing to the women who wield it, as it is to the men learning to relate to power feminists, feminists of the real world. As Camille Paglia says, it is now time to "shift the center of gravity away from academic feminism toward real-life issues." Theresa Rebeck's play *Spike Heels* takes the feminist movement to a new ground, away from books and shaved eyebrows, back to the streets, bars, jobs, and bedrooms, where women appreciate and use their power of enticement. Now at stake is the negotiation of the terms of relations between women and between women and men, as the play aptly demonstrates.

Source: Carole Hamilton, in an essay for *Drama for Students*, Gale Group, 2001.

Critical Essay #4

Korb has a master's degree in English literature and creative writing and has written for a wide variety of educational publishers. In the following essay, she examines issues of objectification and power in relationships between the sexes.

On her date with Edward, Georgie wears her gold spike heels; these shoes function as the central symbol of Theresa Rebeck's plays *Spike Heels*. Georgie wears these shoes to make her more sexy, but as she says immediately after putting them on, when she "staggers" after rising to her feet, "I haven't worn these things for a while and you have to get used to them, you know? It's kind of like walking on stilts." Georgie's admission suggests not just the physical lengths to which women go to entice men, but also suggests to the communiques and relationships that are played out by the play's four characters. Georgie, Edward, Andrew, and Lydia all are walking a symbolic tightrope, crossing over the chasm of stereotypes to try to reach each other and form meaningful connections. As Marsha Mason writes in her introduction to *Women Playwrights, The Best Plays of 1992*, Rebeck "pounds, picks and chisels away at the mountain of sexism and class with Georgie's spike heels." This empowerment is not freely given, however. Georgie earns it by coming face to face with Andrew and Edward's treatment of her.

Throughout the play, Andrew and Edward clearly perceive of Georgie as an object to be desired, subdued, and possessed. Georgie recognizes this truth early on: "You gave me to him?" she asks Andrew, speaking of Edward. Although Andrew protests, explaining that Edward only spoke of her because he thought a relationship might exist between the two, the ensuing conversation between the men demonstrates their attitude toward women. Every reference the men make to Georgie—and to women in general—show that they believe in a woman as object, not as an individual being, whether she be a protege, a secretary, or a sex symbol. Edward openly acknowledges this, reminding Andrew, "I got clearance from you, pal." Andrew realizes that the way they are talking about Georgie is wrong. He reminds Edward, and himself, that Georgie "is not some thing we can pass around between us," but he continues to participate in the conversation, showing that he does not truly believe his own admonition. While it is Edward who openly shows his objectification of Georgie, Andrew's protests are feeble. For example, when Edward says, "[Y]ou'd prefer that no one else had her?," Andrew responds to Edward's use of language —"everything sounds so sleazy coming out of your mouth"—instead of the message inherent in his words.

The challenge between the men is who will win control of Georgie—under whose domination she will submit. The bet that they make symbolizes this.

Edward: How much time you do you need?

Andrew: I don't.

Edward: It took me five minutes to get her to come back. How much time do you need to get her to quit again?

Georgie: *(Knocking.)* Hey, are you guys in there?

Edward: Ten minutes? Will that do? Andrew: You know, Lydia really is right about you. Edward: I'll give you fifteen. That's ten more than I had. And I'll bet you, you still can't do it. How about it, Andrew?

Andrew: I'm not going to bet you

Georgie: *(Pounding.)* You guys

Edward: You're on. . . .

This exchange shows the basic relationship between the men: Edward proposes some "sleazy" idea, and Andrew protests, but not enough to put a halt to Edward's proposition. Indeed, when Georgie enters Andrew's apartment, Andrew sets about to get her to leave her job. His strategies start off with his promise to be of further assistance to her: "I can get you another job," he tells her. "Last night I called some people in the department and found some leads." When that does not work—as Georgie points out "I can take care of myself: I been doing it for years"—Andrew appeals to her emotions. "Last night you said you were in love with me," he says, implying that because she loves him, she should do what he wants her to. Finally, Andrew resorts to pointing out that she is going out on this date with Edward, and dressing sexy and seductively, in order to make him jealous. Georgie, however, points out that, while she may be hoping to do so, these men render her essentially powerless. "I live in a whole different world from you," she says. "I'm in the receiver's position. I do what you guys tell me to: whether it's reading books or f—g. I always manage to do what you say. That's the way we survive."

Source: Rena Korb, in an essay for *Drama for Students*, Gale Group, 2001.

Topics for Further Study

Andrew accuses Edward of "sexual harassment" in his treatment of Georgie. What is sexual harassment? Why is it such an important and controversial issue? Research sexual harassment, concentrating on the difficulties of constructing a legal definition and of enforcement.

Why does Georgie decide to be with Edward instead of Andrew? Think about this question in terms of the development of each character: where does each character begin and what does each character learn in the course of the play?

How is social class important in this play? Each character represents a different social class, and to some extent has stereotypical aspects of that class. How does Rebeck use our expectations of how someone of a particular class behaves, and how do the action of the play and the changing relationships between the characters undermine those expectations?

In *Spike Heels*, Theresa Rebeck alludes a number of times to George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion*. The Pygmalion story did not originate or end with Shaw, however; it is originally a Greek myth, and Shaw's story has been reworked a number of times, most famously as the musical play *My Fair Lady*. Read the Greek myth and Shaw's play or see the movie of the musical and discuss how Rebeck changes the story. What are the changes she works in the structure of the story, and how does this give her play different meanings than the other stories?

What Do I Read Next?

Theresa Rebeck: Collected Plays (1999) collects all of Rebeck's full-length and one-act plays.

Pygmalion is George Bernard Shaw's classic 1913 retelling of the Greek myth. In Shaw's play, a sophisticated London professor bets a friend that he can remake an uneducated, working-class city girl into the very model of upperclass gentility. In accomplishing his goal, he falls in love with her.

Oleanna (1992), a play by David Mamet, explores sexual harassment, as well. But where Rebeck's play takes a comic look at the aftermath of workplace harassment, Mamet's play is a more serious examination of sexual harassment on a college campus.

Further Study

MacKinnon, Catharine, *Only Words*, Harvard University Press, 1993.

MacKinnon examines sexual harassment and explores the legal issues involved with legislating against it.

_____, *Sexual Harassment of Working Women: A Case of Sex Discrimination*, Yale University Press, 1979.

Sexual Harassment of Working Women is one of the first works to identify sexual harassment as a social problem that needs to be addressed.

Phelps, Timothy M., and Helen Winternitz, *Capitol Games: Clarence Thomas, Anita Hill, and the Story of a Supreme Court Nomination*, Hyperion, 1992.

This work is a long and careful look at the Anita Hill case and its effects on American society and politics.

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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.

Citing Drama for Students

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

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

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

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