Watch on the Rhine Study Guide

Watch on the Rhine by Lillian Hellman

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BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

After a critically acclaimed opening at the Martin Beck Theatre in New York in 1941, *Watch on the Rhine* ran for 378 performances. Pamela Monaco, in her article on Lillian Hellman for the *Dictionary of Literary Biography,* notes that the play's appearance at this historical moment, eight months before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, responded to "the political climate of the day," entering into "the continuing debate on American neutrality." She concludes that Americans were already familiar with the Nazi threat but had never before imagined "an antifascist message within a domestic situation." Monaco argues that through her skillful dramatic crafting, Hellman warns that all "who chose to ignore the international crisis were helping to perpetuate it and that no one [could] count himself or herself free of danger." Katherine Lederer, in her article on Hellman for *Twayne's United States Authors Series Online* stated that it was the "right time□for Hellman, for the critics, and for the public. The reviews were glowing, and President Roosevelt ordered a command performance at the National Theater in Washington." In its depiction of a family who struggles to combat the menace of fascism in Europe during the Second World War, *Watch on the Rhine* emerges as a tribute to those who are willing to sacrifice their lives for a noble cause.

Author Biography

Lillian Hellman was born in New Orleans on June 20, 1906, to businessman Max Bernard and Julia Hellman. Carol MacNicholas, in her article on Hellman in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography,* notes that while she and her mother had opposite personalities, Hellman's ties to her mother were quite strong and became a focus of some of her work. After her college years at New York University and Columbia University in the early 1920s, Hellman began her literary career as a manuscript reader for Horace Liveright, Inc., a New York City publishing firm. There she met and married press agent Arthur Kober, with whom she moved to Europe, where she wrote short stories. While traveling to Germany, she observed the beginnings of the Nazi movement and its increasingly vocal anti- Semitism, subjects that she would later explore in her plays. In the 1930s, the couple moved to Hollywood, where Hellman read film scripts for Metro- Goldwyn-Mayer and started a long-term friendship with novelist and screenwriter Dashiell Hammett. With his encouragement, Hellman completed her first play, *The Children's Hour* , produced in 1934. The play, which focuses on the disastrous effects of vicious gossip, earned high praise for its courageous and compelling portrait of homosexual themes. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, with the production of several of her plays, including *Watch on the Rhine* in 1941, Hellman earned a reputation as one of America's finest playwrights. She also became a social activist during this period through her support of Spanish loyalists against dictator Generalissimo Francisco Franco and of Communist causes.

Her literary focus later turned to autobiographical works, including the critically acclaimed memoirs *An Unfinished Woman* (1969), *Pentimento* (1973), and *Scoundrel Time* (1976). One of the stories in *Pentimento* is "Julia," which focuses on an American woman's work in the European underground during World War II, was adapted in 1977 into a successful film by the same name. *Scoundrel Time* includes a chronicle of Hellman's refusal to testify in front of the House Un-American Activities Committee in the 1950s.

During her literary career, Hellman won several awards, including the New York Drama Critics Circle Award in 1941 for *Watch on the Rhine* and in 1960 for *Toys in the Attic* , along with Academy Award nominations for the screenplays of *The Little Foxes* in 1941 and *The North Star* in 1943. In 1964 *Lillian Hellman* she was awarded the Gold Medal for drama from the National Institute of Arts and Letters, and in 1969 she won the National Book Award in Arts and Letters for *An Unfinished Woman* . Hellman died of cardiac arrest on June 30, 1984, in Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts. In his article on her for the *New York Times,* William Wright concludes that Lillian Hellman "remains fascinating" to the public because "as a dramatist, author, screenwriter and activist, [she] was a commanding presence in America's cultural life for half a century."

Plot Summary

Act 1

The play opens in the late spring of 1940 in the living room of the Farrelly home outside of Washington, D.C. Fanny Farrelly, the family matriarch, appears, insisting that her son David be awakened so he will have plenty of time to pick up his sister and her family at the train station. She expresses nervousness about whether everything has been perfectly prepared for her daughter's arrival.

She and Anise, her maid, discuss the bills rung up by their houseguests for the past six weeks, the Count and Countess de Brancovis, and the interest David has taken in the Countess. Fanny explains that she took in Teck and Marthe, her houseguests, because she "felt sorry" for Marthe and was "rather amused" by Teck. However, as she senses the growing attraction between Marthe and her son, she concludes that Marthe and Teck should soon leave.

At breakfast, David and Marthe discuss his sister Sara's marriage to Kurt Müller and his mother's subsequent snubbing of Sara after Sara would not allow her mother to arrange the wedding. When Teck appears, David leaves, and Teck and Marthe discuss their meager finances. Teck tells her that he will be joining a poker game run by an old friend of his in the German Embassy. He explains that his friend may be useful when he wants to leave the country. Marthe responds angrily to the news, chiding, "you can't leave them alone" and insists that his old friends will ignore him. She warns him against being seen at the embassy. Teck changes the direction of their conversation to Marthe's relationship with David. He tells her he suspects her involvement with him and warns "it is unwise to calculate" Teck as a fool.

Later that morning, Sara appears with her family, all shabbily dressed. Sara becomes wistful about her comfortable childhood in that house and admits to her family that she always wanted a nice house for them. When she quickly assumes she has hurt Kurt, her husband, she quickly dismisses her notion, calling herself "foolish" and "sentimental."

When Fanny discovers Sara and her family, she welcomes them all affectionately but nervously. Fanny questions Kurt's health, noting that he was injured while fighting in Spain. Nine-year-old Bodo, clearly taken with his father and his devotion to the antifascist cause, declares him to be a great hero. He and Fanny begin to develop an affection for each other. When David appears, he greets his sister lovingly. Later Fanny criticizes David's taste in women and insists that he has been flirting with Marthe. She then admits she was wrong to disapprove of Sara's marriage to Kurt and suggests that they move in with her.

Fanny begins to ask Kurt about his past, which makes Sara visibly nervous. Kurt reveals he gave up a career in engineering to devote himself to the antifacist cause.

Sara expresses her devotion to the cause as well and gets defensive about her life with Kurt, explaining to her mother that she has had a happy life despite its hardships. Fanny asks forgiveness for her bad manners.

When Teck is introduced, he insists he and Kurt have met before, but Kurt denies it. Later Marthe tells her husband to mind his own business in response to his questions about Kurt. Teck, however, responds, "anything might be my business now." He then abruptly asks her if she and David are having an affair. Marthe admits that she has feelings for David but that they have not consummated their relationship and insists that the subject is none of Teck's business. In a veiled threat, Teck tells her to stay away from David, warning, "you will go with me, when I am ready to go."

Act 2

Fanny reveals to the others that she has heard that Teck won a lot of money at the embassy poker game, which Kurt responds to uneasily. David criticizes Teck for associating with the Nazis. Tensions arise between Teck and Kurt.

Teck later confronts David about his feelings for Marthe when he discovers David has bought her some jewelry. When David, directed by Marthe, tells him their relationship is not his business, Teck warns Marthe that he will not forgive her for that and insists that she go upstairs and pack her things so she can leave with him. Marthe refuses, declaring that she will not "go with him now or ever." She admits that she has never liked him and that she is in love with David. Upset by the emotional scene, Fanny tells them to discuss their situation privately.

Marthe explains her plans to live in Washington, D.C. by herself. She reveals that when she was seventeen, her mother, who controlled and frightened her, forced her into marrying Teck. She then berates Fanny for trying to dominate her children in a similar way. Fanny promptly denies the charges.

After Kurt leaves the room to take a phone call, he returns agitated and tells Sara he has to go to California for a few weeks. Teck shows Kurt the newspaper that reports the capture of Colonel Max Friedank, the chief of the anti-Nazi underground movement. He admits that at the embassy the previous night his associates told him about the incident. They also revealed that they captured two men named Ebber and Triste but are still looking for a man called Gotter. Teck then declares that he would like to have ten thousand dollars before he leaves. Kurt explains that Teck intends to blackmail him.

Kurt concludes that Teck knows he is the hunted man named Gotter and reveals "I am an outlaw." He explains that he has worked in the underground for seven years. The scene closes with Kurt's vow to buy his three comrades' passage out of Germany, where they are being held, with the several thousand dollars he has been carrying around in his bag. Sara supports his decision and tells him not to be afraid.

Act 3

A half-hour later, Teck appears, carrying Kurt's briefcase. He warns David and Fanny to stay out of his negotiations with Kurt. Teck says he knows that Kurt is the Gotter the Nazis have been looking for and reads a statement provided by his acquaintances at the German Embassy about Gotter's activities. He then warns Kurt that if he tells the Nazis where Kurt is, Kurt will not get back to Germany. However, if Kurt gives him ten thousand dollars, Teck will keep silent. When Kurt refuses to be blackmailed, Fanny tells Teck that she will give him the money.

After Kurt determines that Teck will reveal Kurt's identity with or without the money, he kills him. Sara and Joshua, Kurt and Sara's son, cover up the crime. Sara admits "it's the way it had to be." After explaining that his motives for the murder were to save the lives of others, Kurt asks Fanny and David to give him two days to get away. After their initial shock, both David and Fanny accept what has just happened. Fanny tells Kurt to go with her blessing and gives him the money she was going to give Teck so that he can use it for the cause.

Kurt has a difficult time saying goodbye to his children who are quite upset. He admits to them that he has done "a bad thing," but tells them to think about the future and to fight "to make a good world." Sara and Kurt express their love for each other and their hopes to be reunited soon. Fanny admits they have been "shaken out of the magnolias" and David agrees. She tells David, "tomorrow will be a hard day," but tries to put a good face on it. The play ends with mother and son each admiring the other's strength in this difficult moment.

Characters

Anise

Anise, a sixty-year-old French woman, is the Farrelly's maid, who, as the play opens, is seen sorting the family's mail. She is a very proud woman who stands up to Fanny Farrelly's overbearing nature. Often, when Fanny gets nervous or excited, Anise tells her to "compose" or to "contain" herself. Anise also often concerns herself with the family business. Fanny notes that she's a "snooper," which Fanny claims "shows an interest in life."

Countess Marthe de Brancovis

Marthe de Brancovis, in her early thirties, is the daughter of a friend of Fanny's. She and her husband, Count Teck de Brancovis, have been staying with the Farrelly family. Marthe has a strained relationship with her domineering husband and admits during the course of the play that she is in love with David Farrelly. In an attempt to justify her marriage to a man she claims she never loved, she explains to the family that when she was seventeen, her mother forced her into marrying him. She admits that she obeyed her mother's wishes because her mother frightened her. Noting her own timid character, Marthe concludes, "maybe I've always been frightened. All my life."

Marthe gains courage, however, through her relationship with David, which prompts her to stand up to her husband, Teck. When Teck asks her questions about her feelings for David, initially she tells him that that information is none of his business. After Teck presses her, she admits that she is in love with David. Her growing defiance of her husband emerges after Teck tells her he plans on playing poker at the German Embassy. When he tells her that he wants to reestablish connections with the Nazis there, Marthe chides, "Your favorite dream, isn't it . . . that they will let you play with them again." She begins to find her own voice when Teck asks whether she has developed political convictions, responding that she is not sure, but she is certain that she does not like the Nazis. Her newly found courage also prompts her to stand up to Fanny, who, she concludes, has dominated David's life and has tried to force him to be a replacement for his father.

Count Teck de Brancovis

Count Teck de Brancovis is a handsome forty- five-year-old Romanian, married to Marthe. Fanny notes that Teck was "fancy" when Marthe married him but is no longer, "although still chic and tired . . . the way they are in Europe." Hellman provides only sketchy details of his past. Apparently he has had past associations with the Nazis, as Marthe points out when she berates him for wanting to establish connections with the Germans at the Embassy. Marthe concludes that he should not waste his time with

them, warning "they seem to have had enough of you. . . . It would be just as well to admit they are smarter than you are and let them alone."

Teck, like Kurt, is an expatriate, but for different reasons. Kurt hints at the reasons Teck has left his homeland when he notes that Teck wants to return, "but they do not much want" him. Teck uses this connection between them to help him convince Kurt to give him money when he claims, "we are both men in trouble. The world, ungratefully, seems to like your kind even less than it does mine."

Teck, however, is Kurt's moral opposite. He bullies his wife and tries to sell another's life to gain money and a passage back to his home. He appears to have some conscience, but it does not deter his blackmailing scheme. When Fanny confronts him, declaring that she is sickened by his demands, Teck admits the situation "is very ugly. . . . I do not do it without some shame, and therefore I must sink my shame in money."

He reveals his clever nature as he plans to blackmail Kurt by prying open the lock on the suitcase full of money and discovering Kurt's real identity. He also tries to enlist the aid of Kurt's unsuspecting children. When Teck asks Bodo if his father is an expert electrician and "as good with radio," Kurt understands that he is trying to ferret out damaging information and so tells Teck sharply to direct his questions to him.

David Farrelly

David Farrelly is a thirty-nine-year-old lawyer working at his deceased father's firm. For most of the play, he appears affable but weak. He admits, "Mama thinks of me only as a monument to Papa and a not very well made monument at that. I am not the man Papa was." He allows his mother to dominate his life. However, his love for Marthe and his confrontation with the realities of Kurt's dire situation force him to find his own voice.

He begins to stand his own ground with his mother, who criticizes him over his attentions to Marthe. He refuses to break off his relationship with her. His feelings for Marthe also prompt him to face Teck. After Teck asks David about his relationship with Marthe, David tells him that the subject is none of his business. The tension between the two men escalates when Teck reveals his plan to blackmail Kurt. When Teck offers an analysis of the German character, David angrily replies, "Oh, for God's sake, spare us *your* moral judgments." As Teck lays out his blackmailing scheme, David approaches him threateningly, insisting "I'm sick of your talk. We'll get this over with now, without any more fancy talk from you. I can't take much more of you at any cost."

David's greatest challenge, however, comes when he must respond to Kurt's murder of Teck. Initially, he is shocked, as is his mother. Yet when Kurt offers David and his mother two choices□to turn him in immediately or to give him two days to escape□David quickly reassures him, "Don't worry about things here. I'll take care of it. You'll have your two days." By the end of the play, David has developed into a self-confident man who has come out from under the shadow of his father.

Fanny Farrelly

Fanny is the sixty-three-year-old matriarch of the Farrelly family. The high-strung Fanny, although essentially good-natured, tries to control all in her sphere. Her need for control has alienated her from her daughter. When Sara first married Kurt, Fanny broke off ties with her daughter because, as David says, "they didn't let her arrange it." Fanny has been more successful exercising her control over her son. She continually reminds him that he has not lived up to the image she has of her beloved late husband, and, throughout most of his life, David has allowed her this power over him. Marthe confronts Fanny about her overbearing attitude toward David when she declares, "I am sick of watching you try to make him into his father." She forces Fanny to recognize the detrimental effects of her treatment of her son when she compares Fanny to her own mother, who forced her into a marriage with a man she did not love. Marthe concludes that while Sara "got away," David has suffered under his mother's control. She tells Fanny, "I don't think you even know you do it and I don't think he knows it, either. And that's what's most dangerous about it."

Joshua, Sara's son, points out Fanny's naivete about the hardships that her daughter and her family have suffered, when he notes that his grandmother "has not seen much of the world." She admits to this ignorance at the end of the play and attests to her awakening to the harsh realities of the family's situation when she tells David, "We are shaken out of the magnolias, eh?"

Fanny's strength of character, like David's, emerges most clearly at the end of the play when Teck tries to blackmail Kurt. First, she offers to give Teck money so that he will leave Kurt alone. Later, like her son, she must face the fact that Kurt has just committed murder. Initially shocked, she soon composes herself and tells Kurt that he has her blessing. She also gives him the money she had planned to give Teck and tells him to use it for the cause. Her show of courage, along with the recognition of the same quality in her son, helps strengthen the bond she has with David. After the two have made a commitment to help Kurt, David warns her, "We are going to be in for trouble." Fanny, however, insists, "We will manage. I'm not put together with flour paste. And neither are you□I am happy to learn."

Joseph

The Farrelly family's middle-aged black butler, who, like Anise, is not afraid to stand up to Fanny's overbearing personality.

Babette Müller

Babette is Sara and Kurt's twelve-year-old daughter. Despite the family's nomadic existence, the children appear to be well educated and can speak several languages. Babette and her brother Bodo become extremely upset at the news that their father will have to go to Germany without them.

Bodo Müller

Bodo is Sara and Kurt's nine-year-old son. He is devoted to his father's cause, as revealed when he explains to his grandmother, "if we are to fight for the good of all men, it is to be accepted that we must be among the most advanced." Bodo exhibits his philosophical nature when his mother and grandmother begin to argue. He tells them not to get angry with each other; instead they must channel their anger into something important, "for the good of other men." He forms a special bond with Fanny, who recognizes their similarities. They both have strong opinions and are good at heart.

Joshua Müller

Joshua, fourteen, is the Müller's oldest and most practical child. After his father knocks out Teck, Joshua keeps a cool head as he helps his father drag the body out onto the terrace where Kurt kills him.

Kurt Müller

Kurt, a "large, powerful," forty-seven-yearold German, is Sara's husband. For the past seven years, he has been working for the anti-fascist underground, risking his life. The bullet scars on his face and the broken bones in his hands attest to the suffering that he has endured fighting for the cause. He explains that he became politically active in Germany when he saw his people suffer and watched twenty-seven men murdered in a Nazi street fight. At that point he determined not to "stay by now and watch."

He shows great love and concern for his family; yet makes his devotion to the cause his highest commitment. He has put his family's welfare as well as his own in jeopardy as illustrated when he refuses to be blackmailed by Teck. Kurt explains that the money was given to him not to save his life or for the comfort of his family, even when it could have helped him feed them. He reveals his stoic nature when Fanny asks him why he must take the responsibility to fight the Nazis since he has a family, and he claims that everyone could find a reason not to commit himself to the cause.

What is most important to him is "to save the lives and further the work" of the others who fight against the Nazis. To this end, he will commit murder, even though it causes him and his family great pain. In an effort to explain his actions, he asks Fanny and David, "does one understand a killing?" He then compares what he did to the necessity of killing in a war. Yet, he also admits, "I have a great hate for the violent. They are the sick of the world. Maybe I am sick now too." Bernard F. Dick, in his article for *American Writers Supplement,* notes that when Kurt apologizes to his children for committing the murder, he refers to Jean Valjean in *Les Miserables* and so invites a comparison "between the theft of bread and the murder of a fascist." In this way, Dick claims, Kurt "indicts himself and pardons himself at the same time."

Sara Müller

Sara Müller, Fanny's daughter and Kurt's wife, proves her independent nature when she ignores her mother's wish for her not to marry Kurt. Even though when she returns to the Farrelly home she becomes wistful for the comforts she enjoyed while growing up, she declares to her family that she has led a happy and fulfilled life despite its hardships. She fully supports Kurt's dangerous activities and keeps a cool head after he kills Teck, fixing up the room as if she has had this responsibility in the past.

Themes

Heroism

One of the dominant themes in *Watch on the Rhine* is heroism exhibited in a dangerous situation. All of the characters in the play, except the villain Teck, display varying degrees of heroism as they face difficult decisions. The most clearly defined hero is Kurt, who has suffered bullet wounds and broken bones at the hands of the fascists, yet who refuses to give up the fight to overthrow them. When he realizes that he must go back to Germany to free his comrades, he is afraid he will be captured, tortured, and most likely killed, but his fears never deter his devotion to his cause or his decision to leave. Sara and the children also show their heroic nature when they must endure separation from the husband and father they dearly love, and give Kurt their unconditional support.

Fanny and David find themselves acting heroically at the end of the play, which surprises them a bit. After the initial shock at Kurt's murder of Teck, they risk getting in trouble with the authorities, and possibly the fascists who are searching for Kurt, because they too have come to believe in Kurt's cause. They agree to help cover his tracks and give him money to free his comrades.

While not called on to act heroically, Marthe does display courage, especially given the fact, as she admits, that she has been "frightened" all of her life. She stands up to Teck, seemingly for the first time, demanding that he leave Kurt alone. Later in the play, she finds the courage to leave Teck, who has dominated her life since she was a teenager.

Duty and Responsibility

The courageous actions of several of the characters in the play stem from their devotion to duty and responsibility. Kurt feels that he has a duty to his countrymen, whom he has seen murdered by the Nazis, and to all who suffer under fascism. When Fanny implores him to let someone else take the dangerous responsibility of carrying on the fight, someone without a family, he tells her that anyone could find a reason not to commit oneself to the cause. He decided long ago that he could not "stay by now and watch" the fascists destroy others' lives. Sara and the children are devoted to the cause and especially to supporting Kurt, even to the point where they participate in covering up Teck's murder. David and Fanny display a sense of duty and responsibility to Sara and her family when they take them in, help Kurt escape, and determine that they will face the consequences of their actions.

Ignorance

The theme of ignorance takes the form of naïveté as Fanny gradually learns what it is like outside of her sheltered walls. After Fanny is shocked listening to the details of the

hardships Sara and her family have endured, Joshua notes her naïveté when he tells her that she "has not seen much of the world." She admits this fact when, by the end of the play she has learned of the harsh reality of the outside world and acknowledges to David, "we are shaken out of the magnolias, eh?"

Fanny's ignorance can be seen as a metaphor for the ignorance of most Americans in the late 1930s who did not want to get involved in what they considered to be a European conflict. Americans knew of the Nazi threat but could never imagine it would touch their lives in any way. Through Hellman's creative crafting of the play's themes, she warns that all people have the potential of being affected by the menace of fascism and that a continued avoidance of the facts could help enable those in power.

Style

Watch on the Rhine contains melodramatic elements. The melodrama is a type of narrative that incorporates threatening situations into the plot as well as a happy ending. Characters in melodramas tend to be stock figures, for example the longsuffering wife or the virtuous hero.

Hellman structures *Watch on the Rhine* around the threatening situation Kurt experiences when Teck discovers Kurt's identity and tries to blackmail him. Also, some of Hellman's characters appear stereotypical in the play. Sara provides a good example of the long-suffering wife and Joshua serves as the devoted son. Yet Hellman departs from the melodramatic structure through her revelation of the complexity of the play's theme and her depiction of other characters.

Hellman's departure from the traditions of the melodrama provides the play with its originality, which helps maintain the audience's interest. The solution to the threatening situation is Kurt's murder of Teck, which presents thorny moral questions. Even Kurt expresses doubt about his own character after committing the act. Hellman also creates a complex character in Fanny, as she struggles with her need to dominate her family and critique their actions. In addition, the play's ending does not follow the traditional melodramatic format. Kurt does escape Teck's threats, but his future is far from certain. Sara has noted the danger that will await him when he tries to help his comrades escape. She and her children understand that they may never see him again.

Historical Context

Fascism

Fascism is a totalitarian system of government that directs the state to take absolute control of the lives of its people. The term was first used by supporters of Benito Mussolini, Italy's dictator from 1922 until his capture and execution during World War II. Other countries that have established fascist regimes include Spain under the rule of Francisco Franco and Germany under the rule of Adolph Hitler. Fascism emerged as a counter force to the egalitarianism of socialism and democracy, which frightened many conservative Europeans at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. They feared that the lower classes would take power away from the bourgeoisie (middle) class. These conservatives also feared the chaos and general anarchy that inevitably ensued after political revolutions. Fascists played on these concerns, appealing to the people's nationalistic sentiments and promising a return to law and order and Christian morality. The doctrine of fascism includes the glorification of the state and the complete subordination of the people to it. The state creates its own absolute law. A second principle, that of survival of the fittest, is borrowed from social Darwinism and applied to the state. Fascists use this as a justification for aggressive imperialism, claiming that weaker countries will inevitably fall to more powerful ones. This elitist dogma extends to the fascist concept of an authoritarian leader, a superman with superior moral and intellectual powers, borrowed from the theories of philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, who would unite his people and carry on the vision of the totalitarian state.

World War II

The world experienced a decade of aggression in the 1930s that would culminate in World War II. This war resulted from the rise of totalitarian regimes in Germany, Italy, and Japan, which gained control as a result of the depression experienced by most of the world in the early 1930s, and from the conditions created by the peace settlements following World War I. The dictatorships established in each of these countries encouraged expansion into neighboring countries. In Germany, Hitler strengthened the army during the 1930s. In 1936 Benito Mussolini's Italian troops took Ethiopia. From 1936 to 1939 Spain was engaged in civil war involving Francisco Franco's fascist army, aided by Germany and Italy. In March 1938 Germany annexed Austria and in March 1939 occupied Czechoslovakia. Italy took Albania in April 1939. One week after Nazi Germany and (the former) U.S.S.R. signed the Treaty of Nonaggression, on September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland, and World War II began. On September 3, 1939, Britain and France declared war on Germany after a German submarine sank the British ship *Athenia* off the coast of Ireland. Another British ship, *Courageous,* was sunk on September 19, 1939. All the members of the British Commonwealth, except Ireland, soon joined Britain and France in their declaration of war.

The Underground Movement

During World War II an underground movement emerged in Western Europe organized by the Allies. In France, Norway, Denmark, Holland, Belgium, Italy, and Greece, fighting forces trained in guerrilla warfare were created and supported through airdrops and radio communications from London. These resistance forces, led for the most part by American- and British-trained officers, conducted sneak attacks against the enemy, industrial sabotage, espionage, propaganda campaigns, and organized escape routes for Allied prisoners of war. Their activities were one of the major factors that led to the defeat of Germany and the end of World War II.

Critical Overview

Watch on the Rhine won the Drama Critics Circle Award in 1941. The citation for the award praised Lillian Hellman for creating "a vital, eloquent and passionate play about an American family, suddenly awakened to the danger threatening its liberty." The critical reception for *Watch on the Rhine* during its run on Broadway was quite positive. Although that initial acclaim has been tempered over the years, many critics still admire the play's compelling themes and finely-crafted structure.

Scholars have noted the timely and historically significant material in *Watch on the Rhine* . Pat Skantze, in an article on Hellman for *Modern American Women Writers,* notes in a discussion of Kurt's decision to kill Teck that "the question of culpability is exactly what Hellman would be faced with when she appeared before HUAC [the House Un- American Activities Committee]." Brooks Atkinson in a review in the *New York Times* argues that, due to Hellman's adept characterizations, *Watch on the Rhine* "ought to be full of meaning a quarter of a century from now when people are beginning to wonder what life was like in America when the Nazi evil began to creep across the sea."

Some critics, however, find the play dated. Kimball King, in his overview of Hellman for *Contemporary American Dramatists,* claims that *Watch on the Rhine* "contains some witty repartee and suspenseful moments"; however "its solutions to the international crisis are simplistic, and it is better described as an adventure story than a thesis play." Others have noted the play's effective dialogue. Skantze insists that a synopsis of the plot "does not do justice to the subtlety and liveliness of the dialogue." Singling out a few key characters, Skantze writes, "Fanny's caustic repartee is funny and loving and irritating. The children are the stiff grown-ups they should be in light of their past, while Teck is smarmy but charming."

Skantze finds that the characters' actions follow a logical thread, noting "the decision to kill Teck is all Kurt's, but the desire to support him comes thoughtfully and naturally from David and Fanny." Lederer, in her article on Hellman for *Twayne's United States Authors Series Online,* claims that Hellman wrote the character of Kurt "with passion and admiration," and "because he acts with decision and courage," he is Hellman's "most eloquent spokesman for human rights and liberty."

Some critics find fault with the play's structure. George Freedley in his review for the *Morning Telegraph* writes that Hellman "cluttered her play with sub-plots and extraneous action to such an extent to obscure what might have been her best play."

Bernard F. Dick, in his article for *American Writers Supplement,* deems the play a "melodrama of the monochromatic school where the villain is unspeakably black and the hero angelically white. Written in 1940 and produced eight months before Pearl Harbor, the play was understandably more patriotic than eloquent." He finds little difference between the play and "all the espionage films of the 1940's that portrayed an America infected with Nazi spies and fifth columnists, secrets being exchanged at embassy balls,

and revolvers being whipped out of trenchcoat pockets" but acknowledges that it was based in part on autobiographical experiences. He concludes, "One can respect Hellman's sincerity without liking her play." Even though many modern scholars criticize its melodramatic elements, most admit that *Watch on the Rhine* , as noted by Skantze, "combines the best of Hellman's strengths."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
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- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Perkins is an associate professor of English at Prince George's Community College in Maryland and has written several articles on British and American authors. In this essay she examines the theme of aggression and resistance in Lillian Hellman's Watch on the Rhine.

Monaco, in her article on Lillian Hellman for the *Dictionary of Literary Biography,* notes that the appearance of *Watch on the Rhine* on Broadway in 1941, eight months before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, responded to "the political climate of the day," entering into "the continuing debate on American neutrality." She concludes that Americans were already familiar with the Nazi threat but had never before imagined "an antifascist message within a domestic situation."

In 1941 fascism, a totalitarian system of government that takes absolute control of the lives of its people, emerged as the dominant political force in war-torn Europe as Nazi aggression continued to spread over the continent. During this period an underground movement surfaced in Western Europe, organized by the Allies, to fight against fascist control. In *Watch on the Rhine* Hellman creates a microcosm of this pattern of aggression and resist *Bette Davis, as Sara Müller, and Paul Lukas, as Kurt Müller, in a scene from the 1943 film production of* Watch on the Rhine ance in the personal lives of her characters. As she documents the dynamics of the power struggles that occur among the members of the Farrelly family and their houseguests during the early days of World War II, Hellman raises important questions about the nature of ethical responsibility.

The first character Hellman introduces who engages in power plays is Fanny, the domineering matriarch of the Farrelly family. When Fanny first appears, she barks an order to her butler Joseph to ring the breakfast bell, insisting "Breakfast is at nine o'clock in this house and will be until the day after I die." When Joseph informs her that it is only eight-thirty, Fanny instructs him to turn the clocks ahead to nine and ring the bell.

Fanny has tried to dominate the lives of all in the Farrelly household. Besides bullying her servants, she has tried to exert her control over her daughter, Sara, and son, David. Sara escaped her mother's dominion through her marriage to Kurt, but David has put up with her harassment all of his life. Fanny dominates him through attacks on his self worth, continually reminding him that he has not lived up to the image she has of her beloved late husband. David has allowed her this power over him as she tries to shape him into her vision of his father. At one point, he admits to his sister, "Mama thinks of me only as a monument to Papa and a not very well-made monument at that. I am not the man Papa was."

Marthe points out the damaging effects of Fanny's exercise of power over her son, insisting that he is suffering under her control. She tells Fanny, "I don't think you even know you do it and I don't think he knows it, either. And that's what's most dangerous

about it." Fanny, however, has not set up a totalitarian regime in her household. Her basic humanity allows those she tries to dominate to resist her authority. For example, both of her servants practice resistance to her aggressive tendencies. Skantze, in his article on Hellman for *Modern American Women Writers,* criticizes Hellman's depiction of Anise as well as Joseph, insisting that her characterization of them presents a prejudicial, "two-dimensional ignorance of the lives of blacks and a lack of courage on the part of the playwright to allow the characters a life and story of their own." Skantze fails to recognize, however, that neither Anise nor Joseph, the Farrelly's servants, is afraid to stand up to Fanny's overbearing personality. When the play opens, the viewer sees Anise riffling through the family's mail, openly defying the traditional hierarchy of the master-servant relationship. Fanny responds to this overt challenge to her privacy by concluding that Anise is a "snooper," a quality Anise says "shows an interest in life."

Anise continues this defiance throughout the play by constantly upbraiding Fanny when her emotions get out of control, instructing her employer to "compose" or to "contain" herself. Joseph resists Fanny's authority in more subtle ways. Besides informing Fanny that she is planning breakfast too early, he reminds her after one of her outbursts, "you told me the next time you screamed to remind you to ask my pardon," and Fanny complies.

Fanny has also accepted Sara's challenge to her authority. She welcomes her daughter back into her home with open arms, willing to ignore the fact that Sara had refused to allow Fanny the planning of her wedding. As Fanny presses Sara and Kurt about their life together, Sara angrily remonstrates her mother for her critical views. Yet when Kurt explains the cause his family has been fighting for and tells of the hardships they have endured, Fanny admits, "I am old. And made of dry cork. And badmannered," and asks for their forgiveness. Fanny's willingness to accept challenges to her power reveals her inherent morality, a quality that will emerge more fully by the end of the play when she becomes involved in Kurt's antifascist activities.

Eventually Fanny also accepts David's challenge to her authority. When David enters into a relationship with Marthe, Fanny disapproves and warns him to stay away from her. However, David's love for Marthe, coupled with his recognition of Teck's evil nature, gives him the courage to ignore his mother's wishes.

The most intense power struggle emerges between Teck, Fanny's Romanian houseguest, and Kurt. When Teck, a Nazi sympathizer, discovers Kurt's true identity, he tries to blackmail him. Teck determines he will enforce a fascist control over the situation, seemingly giving Kurt no choice but to acquiesce to his demands. Teck insists that he will inform his acquaintances at the German Embassy of Kurt's whereabouts if Kurt does not give him the money that he has collected for his antifascist cause.

Teck successfully exercises a similar type of rigid control over Marthe, whom he married when she was a teenager. This control is illustrated when Teck confronts Marthe about her relationship with David and warns, "Do not make plans with David. You will not be able to carry them out. You will go with me, when I am ready to go." Yet when Marthe suspects Teck's campaign to cause trouble for Kurt, she finds the courage to stand up to

him and finally leave him. Her newfound strength also enables her to upbraid Fanny for her treatment of her son.

Marthe's decision to leave Teck, however, has no influence over his determination to blackmail Kurt. His brutal plan emerges from his desire to restore his reputation and so return to his homeland. Teck feels confident that by turning Kurt over to the Nazis, he will gain important allies. In addition, the power exhibited by the Nazis intrigues Teck, a fact Marthe notes when Teck tells her of his plans to play poker with them. At this point, Marthe chides, "your favorite dream, isn't it . . . that they will let you play with them again."

Faced with Teck's absolute control over his life and the lives of his comrades, Kurt makes a decision to resist, which raises complex moral questions. When he murders Teck so that he and his comrades may escape and continue the fight against fascism, he tries to justify his actions to the Farrelly family. He likens his situation to that of a war, explaining to them that if he had spared Teck's life, he would be "pampering" himself and risking the lives of others. Yet he also declares that he has "a great hate for the violent," because "they are the sick of the world," and then adds, "Maybe I am sick now, too."

At the end of the play, Kurt places his life in Fanny's and David's hands, when he asks that they give him two days to escape before they talk to the authorities. Neither Fanny nor David abuses the power he has given them. Hellman suggests that in their decision to support Kurt and aid in his escape, David and Fanny exhibit ethical responsibility. Their actions during this crisis have proved their inherent morality and have forced them to recognize each other's strengths. By the end of the play, mother and son acknowledge their previous ignorance of the reality of the effects of fascism and the fact they have been "shaken out of the magnolias." They prepare to face together, on equal footing, the "trouble" that lies ahead of them.

In the stirring account of a family's battle against the menace of fascism during the first half of the twentieth century, Hellman explores the desire for power and its often devastating consequences. In its recreation of a historically significant moment, *Watch on the Rhine* raises compelling ethical questions in its complex study of the politics of aggression and resistance on a national as well as a personal front.

Source: Wendy Perkins, Critical Essay on *Watch on the Rhine,* in *Drama for Students,* The Gale Group, 2002.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, the author discusses Hellman's Watch on the Rhine *as a mature depiction of an historical era, detailing the threat of war and larger ethical questions through its focus on one family.*

Watch on the Rhine , which opened 1 April 1941, was a call to arms to the American public, who, Hellman felt, were too complacent about the menace of Fascism, which she had experienced firsthand in the Spanish civil war. Like Bertolt Brecht, Mark Estrin notes, Hellman "expects her audience to be enraged enough by the injustice she dramatizes to leave the theatre and take social action." As might be expected, the play did not generate an immediate reversal of American political policy, but it did have an impact on American thinking as an influential work rallying support for the allies. In October 1941 the Free World Association broadcast the play in German via shortwave to Germany in a special performance from backstage, with Mady Christians repeating her role as Sara and Otto Preminger as Kurt.

Eight months after *Watch on the Rhine* opened, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, precipitating America's entry into World War II. From its opening night to its closing 378 performances later in February 1942, audiences responded enthusiastically. Critic Stark Young was more reserved: "some of the first act appears to lose time or wander too amiably□for one instance, perhaps with the scene of the children in which so many lines are given to Bodo, the comical, pedantic little boy" (*The New Republic,* 14 April 1941). Wolcott Gibbs of *The New Yorker* judged it "a fine honest and necessary play in which the fundamental issue of our time has been treated with dignity, insight, and sound theatrical intelligence." The play earned the New York Drama Critics' "best play" award and in January appeared in a command performance at the White House, for "the first public appearance of President Roosevelt since war had been declared." London and Moscow performances followed, and in 1942 and 1943, after the Broadway production closed, *Watch on the Rhine* was staged in regional theaters across America.

Feeling that "her writing had to spring from a completely realized world, the kind a novelist presents," Hellman researched the play carefully, amassing material on every aspect of German life. Margaret Case Harriman was so impressed with Hellman's careful, voluminous notes that she believed they "could be expanded . . . into a detailed and accurate history of a period covering 25 years." The actual writing of the play went smoothly, says Hellman: "The only play I have ever written that came out in one piece, as if I had seen a landscape and never altered the trees or the seasons of their colors."

For her approach, Hellman used Henry James's contrast in *The American* and *The Europeans* between worldly wise Europeans and naive, wellmeaning Americans. The play is family oriented, centering upon the Americans, the Farrellys, and set in their spacious, well-appointed home in the suburbs of Washington, D.C. Matriarch Fanny presides over the household; her son David, an attorney, lives with her. The action begins when her daughter Sara, who has left home to marry German anti- Fascist Kurt Muller, arrives from Europe with him and their three children. Another American is

Marthe, forced into a loveless marriage to a Rumanian count by her mother, dazzled by his title. The Farrellys have not inquired into the background of the count, who, with Marthe, has been their houseguest for six weeks. Count Teck de Brancovis and Kurt are immediately suspicious of each other. A friend of the Nazi officials at the German embassy in Washington, Teck is down on his luck and nearly penniless. He suspects there is a price on Kurt's head as an anti-Fascist leader, whom he could betray to the Nazis, and further learns that Kurt is carrying $23,000, "gathered from the pennies of the poor," to finance the resistance. Their conflict forms the basis of the action, with a romantic subplot involving David Farrelly and Marthe. As the tension increases, it becomes clear it is a conflict that can be resolved only by the death of one of the men.

Teck de Brancovis is a man of no substance, neither material nor moral. His quest for money and power has long since eroded any scruples he ever had, and he is perfectly willing to play cards with Nazis and Americans who sell illegal armaments. Hellman based his character on Rumanian Prince Antoine Bibesco, a practiced cardsharp who fleeced her of some six hundred dollars at the London home of Lady Margot Asquith in 1936. Teck too is a cardsharp who relies on the game as a major source of income and looks to be useful to his unsavory associates in the hopes of regaining access to power.

The Muller family no sooner arrives in act 1 than Teck senses there is profit to be made from learning as much as possible about Kurt, Fanny's unlikely son-in-law, "a German who has bullet scars on his face and broken bones in his hands" and whose luggage is unlocked, while a shabby briefcase is carefully locked. Sure that he is on the scent of someone the Nazis would pay to know about, Teck investigates the Muller baggage at the first opportunity. News of the capture of other important resistance leaders jogs Teck's memory. He realizes that Kurt is now at the top of the Nazis' most wanted list and attempts to blackmail him, offering him, in return for ten thousand dollars, a month of silence in which to try to return to Germany to rescue his comrades. Kurt, however, knows, as Fanny and David do not, of Teck's unsavory background in Europe and that his offer of silence is purest sham. He is a deadly threat to Kurt and Kurt's colleagues, and before he can betray them to their deaths, he must be killed. Through Teck, the audience sees that the charm, the culture, the polish of some European aristocracy masks a rotten core. Whatever last tatters of decency Teck displays in his farewell to Marthe and his excuses to the Farrellys, he remains a man who will sell anyone and anything for personal advantage, a dangerous enemy who must be eliminated.

Unlike Marthe and Teck, Sara and Kurt are an American/European combination that embodies that which is best in both worlds. They respect each other, their love is as fresh as when they first met twenty years ago, and their children are warm and courteous. The heroic figure of Kurt Muller is based, Hellman says, on her beloved friend Julia, who devoted her wealth, her intelligence, and even her life to fight Fascism. The choice to make Kurt a German indicates Hellman's acknowledgment that not all Germans slavishly followed Hitler. She further avoids a simplistic view of Germany and even of Fascists through Kurt's continuing pride in his country "for that which is good" and the hope he expresses of bringing the Farrellys to Europe after the war to "show them what Germany can be like." In response to Teck's observation in act 3 that "there is a deep sickness in the German character . . . a pain-love, a death-love," Kurt offers

an analysis that recognizes gradations among Fascists: "There are those who give the orders, those who carry out the orders, those who watch the orders being carried out . . . Frequently they come in high places and wish now only to survive. They came late: some because they did not jump in time, some because they were stupid, some because they were shocked at the crudity of the German evil, and preferred their own evils, and some because they were fastidious men." For the last group, he says, "we may well someday have pity."

In speaking of Hellman's "mature realism," Timothy Wiles points out that she "avoids a doctrinaire explanation for the Nazi's evil ascendancy based simply on economics, and dramatizes social forces like the authoritarian personality and ideas like the banality of evil." She recognizes Fascism as "a psychological force that could be unleashed in the mass mind by its proponents' conscious manipulation of racial hatred." At no point does Hellman underestimate the evil the Nazis represent, and Kurt's speech is not intended to mitigate that evil. In fact, when Teck tells Kurt, "You have an understanding heart," Kurt rejoins, "I will watch it." Hellman's intention is to show that an evil of such magnitude comprises a broad spectrum of human frailties, which makes it even more dangerous.

On a personal level, Kurt Muller is a charming, mature, acutely intelligent man who can hold his own with a forceful personality like Fanny Farrelly. His love for his family is profound, and he is very much aware that his work to guarantee their future has entailed the sacrifice of his children's childhood. By this revelation in act 3, the audience is aware that no such option as a normal childhood exists under the circumstances, and the life they have had is at least one of honor, decency, and hope.

One of Kurt's most appealing qualities is his love for his wife: he encourages her to enjoy the pleasures of her family home without fear of offending him; he respects and praises all her contributions to their partnership, and his love for her is both tender and yet still charged with sexual ardor. In act 2, when he knows he must return to Germany because of the capture of his colleagues, he draws Sara to him, saying, "How many years have I loved that face?" and then "kisses her, as if it were important," unheeding of the others in the room. It is a powerful display of lasting romantic love.

The major hallmarks of Kurt's heroism are his honesty and personal integrity. Hellman deliberately avoids affiliating him with any particular party, thereby removing the audience's option to disassociate from him on the basis of political prejudices, and it seems fair to assume that this was also the reason she includes no reference to anti-Semitism. Instead, Kurt is an Everyman, representing the potential in each person to respond to the call of conscience. He speaks movingly of the Spanish civil war, where he fought as a member of the German brigade. For Kurt, August 1931, when he saw "twenty-seven men murdered in a Nazi street fight" in his hometown, marked the end of passive hope and the beginning of action. He concludes the story, saying, "I remember Luther, 'Here I stand. I can do nothing else. God help me. Amen.'"

Repeatedly, Kurt brings the issue down to personal responsibility, a recurrent theme in Hellman's plays. When Fanny and David try to dissuade him from returning to almost

certain death by citing his family as a reason to stay, Kurt points out that each man has a reason not to fight, yet each must sleep with his conscience. The fact that he is a vulnerable man whose hands, broken by torture, shake when he is afraid, and who admits to the fear he feels, only underscores his heroism. Kurt's courage and determination send the message, as David says in act 2, that "it's the way all of us should feel." And Kurt, who hates violence, makes sure there is no glossing over his murder of Teck, that his children know this is not the way their world should be. His leave-taking ends on an optimistic yet uncertain note, for the prospects for survival are dismal for so likable and courageous a man.

Sara Muller is the ideal wife and mother of the forties. In direct contrast to Marthe, Sara is the American girl of independent spirit who defied her mother and chose her husband for love, not status and wealth. Her mother is shocked to learn that Sara worked to support her family, enabling Kurt to pursue his anti-Fascist work, and says the Farrellys would gladly have sent money had it been requested. Yet Sara's convictions are Kurt's; her passionate espousal of his ideals is indistinguishable from her profound love for him. There is a satellite quality to both Sara's opinions and her status in her family. She explains to Fanny and David, "I wanted it the way Kurt wanted it," a combination of political and moral ideals and deep love for her husband. She may indeed be as Kurt describes her, "brave and good . . . handsome and gay"; nonetheless, she is still only a "good girl," as her brother so approvingly remarks when she says she wants Kurt to go, to save the people so important to him and to their cause.

Although their parts are minor, the children make important contributions to the play. They represent the most powerful motive of all for mounting the fight against Fascism, the future of the world's children. They serve less lofty purposes as well. In their innocence they remark on the wonders of American life, simultaneously flattering an American audience on their standard of living and revealing the harsh circumstances under which the Mullers have been existing. Babette's shy request for an egg for breakfast, "if an egg is not too rare or too expensive," makes their deprivations vividly real. The eldest, Joshua, invites Fanny to practice her languages with them as they "speak ignorantly, but much, in German, Italian, Spanish□." These pieces of information from the children picture the life the Mullers have been forced to live under Hitler and relieve Kurt of having to do so.

Individually, they are stereotypically fine young people. Joshua intends to carry on his father's fight against Fascism. Babette, like her mother, puts a brave face on hardships. Bodo, the youngest, is a funny little boy, self-confident, enchanted with grand words, and thoroughly convinced that his father is the greatest hero on earth. His age makes it appropriate for him to inadvertently reveal important information, and also allows him to sing his father's praises freely. His main function, however, is to transmit Kurt's philosophical and political beliefs in such a way as to make them accessible without the sententiousness they might have were an older person to deliver them. He makes pompous little speeches that are obvious echoes of his father's views, but Bodo's stilted English, filled with big words, often mispronounced, gives them a lighter, slightly comical flavor. Hellman thus gets across important ideological messages without diminishing

their significance or boring the audience. If anything, Kurt's beliefs are enhanced by Bodo's endearing delivery of them.

Described as "a handsome woman of about sixty-three," Fanny Farrelly is a woman of strong, vivid personality who has enjoyed wealth and status all her life. Her father had been an ambassador and her husband, the late "famous Joshua Farrelly," was ambassador to France in addition to founding a distinguished law firm. Her life has been as rich in experience as in material comforts, and the deep love she and her husband had for one another is a source of happy memories and a point of pride with her. He remains the yardstick by which all men, especially her son David, are to be measured.

Since traditional ideals of romantic love, marriage, and family, and women's place in relation to them underpin the structure of this play, it is appropriate that Fanny Farrelly adored her husband while he was alive and cherishes his memory after his death. She represents a certain idea of the feminine that audiences at that time found particularly sympathetic, that of a woman who, while very much a distinctive personality in her own right, is yet quite happy to defer to her husband and to play a subordinate role. As Vivian Patraka points out, the appeal of romantic love surviving intact would divert most women today from the realities such a relationship implies. Fanny's frequent references to Joshua Farrelly make him an almost palpable presence in the play. Although Fanny may be a widow, she is not alone; the husband who was the source of her status still validates that status and attenuates her authority as matriarch. Fanny is free to speak as she pleases because she does not violate traditional ideas of womanly behavior and woman's place within the family.

Much of the humor of the play derives from Fanny's outspokenness and her capricious behavior. She expresses her opinions freely, even bluntly, as when she surveys her grandchildren for the first time. She compliments Joshua on bearing the name and looks of his grandfather, praises Babette, and then to nine-year-old Bodo remarks, "You look like nobody." Fanny and her son David embody characteristics generally recognized as American, and most of these are flattering to the national image. Fanny's candor and individuality, her self-confidence, and her generosity are such. However, Hellman's intention in *Watch on the Rhine* is not simply to mirror that which is admirable in the American character but to move Americans from a stance she considers dangerously naive.

This naïveté is displayed by both Fanny and David. Fanny has invited the count and Marthe as houseguests because, she explains to David in act 1, " felt sorry for Marthe, and Teck rather amused me. He plays good cribbage and tells good jokes." Despite her years as an ambassador's wife, Fanny remains naive in her judgment of Europeans, and her superficial assessment of Teck proves a dangerous mistake. When she rebukes Kurt for carelessness in leaving thousands lying around, he points out that the money was in a locked briefcase, concluding, "It was careless of you to have in your house a man who opens baggage and blackmails." Her carelessness is of a piece with her role in life. Political convictions were her husband's province. Her job was to be charming, to garner gossip, "wit it up," and pass it along entertainingly. Fanny's antics do double, even triple, service. They are comic relief to the play's more serious theme, they

mitigate Fanny's status as an authority figure so that she remains sympathetic, and they indicate an area where change and growth are needed. For Fanny will be capable of mature behavior when the need arises. As act 3 draws to a close, she rallies behind Kurt and his cause, signaling her support of him with that highest of accolades, a quotation from husband Joshua. She also stands prepared to take responsibility for helping Kurt hide the murdered Teck and to escape the country.

Her son David has not been able to assert himself because of his flawed self-esteem. The source of his difficulty may lie in Fanny's habitually comparing him to his father and his choosing to believe her judgments of him. His love for and defense of Marthe strengthens his resolve, as he does not permit Teck to bully her nor does he allow Fanny to interfere, as she has in the past, with his relationships. By the play's end he understands the dangers Kurt faces and is prepared to aid him. David has become a strong, mature, independent adult. When Fanny says to David at the end of act 3, "Well, here we are. We are shaken out of the magnolias, eh?" it is clear that they are now aware of the dangerous realities that lurk just beneath the surface of life as they have previously known it. When David warns her that trouble lies ahead, she replies that she understands: "We will manage. I'm not put together with flour paste. And neither are you□I am happy to learn."

Structurally, *Watch on the Rhine* is an interweaving of contrasts; the lighter comedic threads of Fanny's outbursts and sharp humor and Bodo's grandiose speeches provide relief from, and at the same time intensify the effect of, the darker strands of menace. The opening act is predominantly light, with the warmth of the reunion, yet darker notes sound with the threat posed by Teck's curiosity. Act 2, set ten days later, when relationships have developed, opens in a light, comic vein but darkens midway with the news of the capture of Kurt's comrades and Teck's attempt at blackmail. The final act reverses the first and is a crescendo of darkness relieved briefly by one or two comic touches and by the warmth of Kurt's love for his family, and finally by the resolve of all to fight Fascism, despite the cost.

In 1942 the movie of *Watch on the Rhine* was scripted by Dashiell Hammett, with additional scenes by Hellman. Paul Lucas repeated his Broadway role of Kurt, and Bette Davis played Sara. One last hurdle Hellman had to overcome was the Breen Office stipulation that murder be punished, that Kurt be assassinated in retaliation for his killing Teck. Her letter to the censors, whom she complained to the producer were "not only as unintelligent as they were in the old days, but . . . growing downright immoral," was characteristically caustic: the country was at war with the Nazis. Should American soldiers who killed Nazis also pay with their lives? The film still stands as a classic example of American cinematography. Although its revival in 1979 was considered "dated" by the critics, the play represents one of the best of the pro-war dramas, one which translated the panorama of "historical events and emotions connected to them" into the smaller, more accessible frame of the family, so that the spectator can "internalize and internationalize what [is] now recreated as a domestic crisis." Much as *The Diary of Anne Frank* made the fate of millions a palpable reality through a single girl, *Watch on the Rhine* , through its focus on a family in early 1941, made Americans aware of the threat to their security.

Source: Alice Griffin, " *Watch on the Rhine,* " in *Understanding Lillian Hellman,* University of South Carolina Press, 1999, pp. 63-75.

Critical Essay #3

In the following article, the author examines Hellman's Watch on the Rhine *as a lasting drama which articulates the ethical choices of well-developed characters in a specific historical context.*

The time is late in the spring of 1940. The place is a spacious home twenty miles from Washington, D.C., where dowager Fanny Farrelly lives with her bachelor son David. Refugee Roumanian Count Teck De Brancovis and his wife Marthe (daughter of a girlhood friend of Fanny's) are house guests. The count, a decadent aristocrat who has always lived by his wits, is a hanger-on at the German embassy. Fanny's daughter Sara arrives from Europe with her children and her husband Kurt Müller, a member of the underground resistance movement. Kurt is carrying $23,000 in a briefcase, money to be used to help rescue political prisoners from the Nazis. The count discovers the money, figures out Kurt's identity, and tries to blackmail him by threatening to reveal that identity to the Germans. Kurt is forced to kill him, and Fanny and David, stripped of their American naiveté decide to keep quiet about the murder long enough for Kurt to leave the country and return to Germany, where he will attempt to free the prisoners and will almost certainly be killed.

Kurt makes a moving farewell speech to his children in which he tells them that killing is always wrong and that he is fighting for a world where all men, women, and children can live in peace.

"There are plays that, whatever their worth, come along at the right time," says Hellman of *Watch on the Rhine* . It was the right time□for Hellman, for the critics, and for the public. The reviews were glowing, and President Roosevelt ordered a command performance at the National Theater in Washington.

Although many critics felt at the time that *Watch on the Rhine* was Hellman's best play, it has received little critical attention in subsequent years. In discussions of her work it is usually dismissed in a sentence or two as the best anti-Nazi play of the war years, although in 1941 it received the Drama Critics' award for the best play of the season. The Critics' award was presented for a "vital, eloquent and compassionate play about an American family suddenly awakened to the danger threatening their liberty." Herman Shumlin said he was not surprised that *Watch on the Rhine* won: "I have always thought from the day I read it that it was a great play and fine dramatic literature."

On opening night Shumlin stood in the lobby, hissing imprecations at people arriving late. Hellman had not been as sure of the play's success as Shumlin. Several reviewers commented on the bronchial opening night audience. Hellman sat through the first act, then went to Shumlin and told him, "It's no use, Herman. Make up your mind to it. This isn't going to go."

"Get out of here," Shumlin answered. "Get out and stay out. Don't you remember you said the same thing about *The Little Foxes* ?"

The command performance requested by Roosevelt was for the benefit of the Infantile Paralysis Fund. At a supper following the performance the President asked Hellman several times when she had written the play. Hellman says, "When I told him I started it a year and a half before the war, he shook his head and said in that case he didn't understand why Morris Ernst, the lawyer, had told him that I was so opposed to the war that I had paid for the 'Communist' war protesters who kept a continuous picket line around the White House before Germany attacked the Soviet Union. I said I didn't know Mr. Ernst's reasons for that nonsense story, but Ernst's family had been in business with my Alabama family long ago and that wasn't a good mark on any man."

She continues, "But the story about my connection with the picket line was there to stay, often repeated when the red-baiting days reached hurricane force. But by that time, some of the pleasant memories of *Watch on the Rhine* had also disappeared: Lukas, once so loud in gratitude for the play, put in his frightened, blunted knife for a newspaper interviewer."

But in 1941 there was mostly only praise for a fine, patriotic play. Except for Grenville Vernon's review, the strongest dissenting note came from the *New Masses* and the *Daily Worker.*

Authors of books about "radical theater" occasionally mention *Watch on the Rhine* as an example of a "leftist" play. The writer of such a work never deals with Hellman extensively, using such reasons as Hellman's not having written enough plays in the 1930s for adequate analysis, although three plays would seem to be ample. The writers then use Odets, Lawson, *et al.* A more likely reason for Hellman's exclusion from such treatments is that her plays do not fit the writers' theses. She wrote *The Little Foxes* , not " *Waiting for Horace.* " As Hellman told Roosevelt, she had been working on *Watch on the Rhine* since 1939, and the play opened while the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression pact was still in effect.

Aside from the anti-fascist content of the play, the character of Kurt Müller, the resistance fighter, received the most attention. Critics praised Hellman for making the protagonist, as they so regarded him, German. Müller is described by reviewers as the protagonist, the central figure, the principal character, "her hero." If one feels that there is a single protagonist, then other criticisms follow. George Freedley, for example, complained that Hellman had "cluttered her play with sub-plots and extraneous action to such an extent to obscure what might have been her best play."

Let us assume for the moment that *Watch on the Rhine* is not solely about Kurt Müller, but is also the story of Fanny Farrelly, a matriarch from another time (her husband knew Henry Adams, and in Adams's day Washington was a relatively small, sleepy Southern town); of her son David, who has never asserted himself, but who has allowed his mother to attempt to make him into his father's image (Joshua's portrait watches over the living room, and Fanny refers to him often); of Marthe, an American who was forced by her mother to marry a title; and of the Roumanian count, European like Kurt Müller, but of the type who let Hitler happen, whose only interest is self-aggrandizement and survival.

In other words, let us assume that *Watch on the Rhine* is like *Days to Come, The Little Foxes, The Searching Wind, Another Part of the Forest, The Autumn Garden* , and *Toys in the Attic* □a multiplecharacter play. What, then, is the play about? "What it contrasts are two ways of life□ours with its unawakened innocence and Europe's with its tragic necessities." The contrast is presented in a sunny, spacious living room, a setting completely alien to the horrors occurring in Europe. But the watch on the Rhine comes to the Potomac, causing the Americans to be "shaken out of the magnolias." They learn what Alexandra learned in *The Little Foxes* , "that the fundamental clash in civilization is between those bent on self-aggrandizement and those who are not and that 'it doesn't pay in money to fight for that in which we believe'." There are those who eat the earth and those who stand around and watch them eat it.

We meet the Americans and their house guests at breakfast, and their characters are firmly established before the arrival of the Müllers. As Richard Watts said, Hellman provides the "comfortable feeling that the play you are watching is a living, breathing thing, with people in it who have a life of their own outside the narrow confines of the theater's walls, and thus are engaging in activities that have significance about them. All good plays obviously give some sense of this, but not all of them have the three-dimensional quality in so complete a fashion as 'Watch on the Rhine,' and for this I think the much-criticized first act . . . is in great part responsible."

The contrast, not only between Europeans and Americans but between two European-American marriages, may remind one of Henry James. (James Agee, reviewing the movie version, said he wished James had written it.) This resemblance is not coincidental, although Hellman says today that only diaries of the time "could convince [her] now that *Watch on the Rhine* came out of Henry James." At the time of the original production Hellman told an interviewer, "When I was working on 'The Little Foxes' I hit on the idea□well, there's a small, Midwestern American town, average or perhaps a little more isolated than average, and into that town Europe walks in the form of a titled couple□a pair of titled Europeans□pausing on their way to the West Coast . . . .

"Later I had another idea. What would be the reactions of some sensitive people who had spent much of their lives starving in Europe and found themselves as house guests in the home of some very wealthy Americans? What would they make out of all the furious rushing around, the sleeping tablets taken when there is no time to sleep them off, the wonderful dinners ordered and never eaten . . .? . . . That play didn't work either. I kept worrying at it, and the earlier people, the titled couple, returned continually. It would take all afternoon and probably a lot of tomorrow to trail all the steps that made those two plays into 'Watch on the Rhine.' The titled couple are still in, but as minor characters. The Americans are nice people, and so on. It all is changed, but the new play grew out of the other two."

In *Pentimento* Hellman says that she dreamed one night of the poker party in London at which she met the man who suggested the Roumanian count in *Watch on the Rhine* . Wanting to "write a play about nice, liberal Americans whose lives would be shaken up by Europeans, by a world the new Fascists had won because the old values had long been dead," she used the setting of an Ohio town. Waking from the dream, she knew

that she "had stubbornly returned to the people and the place of *Days to Come* ." She changed the setting to Washington, introduced the character of Kurt Müller, who "was, of course, a form of Julia," Hellman's girlhood friend killed by the Nazis. (Hellman eventually used her notion about European reaction to affluent Americans in *The Autumn Garden* . The profession of Fanny Farrelly's husband, diplomacy, is used in *The Searching Wind* .) *Watch on the Rhine* is, in a sense, her tribute to Julia, and also to the men "willing to die for what they believed in" whom she had seen in the Spanish Civil War.

Perhaps Kurt Müller seems the lone protagonist not only because Hellman wrote the role with passion and admiration, but because he acts with decision and courage and is Hellman's most eloquent spokesman for human rights and liberty. But the other characters are faced with ethical choices because of his arrival. At the end of the first act Marthe warns Teck against harming Kurt. She tells him she will leave him if he makes trouble. At the end of the second act, Teck asks her to leave with him. She refuses, saying, "You won't believe it, because you can't believe anything that hasn't got tricks to it, but David hasn't much to do with this. I told you I would leave someday, and I remember where I said it□and why I said it."

Kurt tells Fanny and David that Teck has discovered the $23,000 Kurt is carrying, "gathered from the pennies of the poor who do not like Fascism." When Fanny asks whether it wasn't careless of him to "leave twenty-three thousand dollars lying around to be seen," Kurt answers, "No, it was not careless of me. . . . It was careless of you to have in your house a man who opens baggage and blackmails." David and Fanny take the first step toward joining Kurt's side when they offer to pay Teck themselves. But they still don't understand completely. David tells Kurt he will be safe: "You're in this country. They can't do anything to you. They wouldn't be crazy enough to try it. Is your passport all right?" When Kurt says it isn't quite, Fanny asks why it isn't. Kurt says, "Because people like me are not given visas with such ease. . . . Madame Fanny, you must come to understand it is no longer the world you once knew." Still failing to understand, David tells Kurt, "It doesn't matter. You're a political refugee. We don't turn back people like you." Sara says, "You don't understand, David," and explains that Kurt has to go back to Germany.

In Act III Teck reads from a German embassy list of wanted men a description of Kurt's underground activities. When Fanny says she is sickened by Teck, Kurt makes a key speech: "Fanny and David are Americans and they do not understand our world□as yet. (*Turns to David and Fanny*) All Fascists are not of one mind, one stripe. There are those who give the orders, those who carry out the orders, those who watch the orders being carried out. Then there are those who are half in, half hoping to come in. . . Frequently they come in high places and wish now only to survive. They came late: some because they did not jump in time, some because they were stupid, some because they were shocked at the crudity of the *German* evil, and preferred their own evils, and some because they were fastidious men. For those last, we may well someday have pity. They are lost men, their spoils are small, their day is gone. (*To Teck*) Yes?" And Teck replies, "Yes. You have the understanding heart."

When Fanny and David leave the room to get the money, Teck says, "The new world has left the room. . . We are Europeans, born to trouble and understanding it. . . . They are young. The world has gone well for most of them. For us□we are like peasants watching the big frost. Work, trouble, ruin□But no need to call curses at the frost. There it is, it will be again, always□for us." Teck is almost pitiable. Sara counters his effectiveness, however, by speaking up and saying, "We know how many there are of you. They don't, yet. My mother and brother feel shocked that you are in their house. For us□we have seen you in so many houses."

After Kurt kills Teck, he says, "I have a great hate for the violent. They are the sick of the world. Maybe I am sick now, too." A gentle man, a man of peace, driven to murder to protect the cause he is fighting for, he says to his children as he prepares to leave them, "Do you remember when we read *Les Misérables* ? . . . He stole bread. The world is out of shape we said, when there are hungry men. And until it gets in shape, men will steal and lie and□ and□kill. But for whatever reason it is done, and whoever does it□you understand me□it is all bad. I want you to remember that. Whoever does it, it is bad."

Fanny and David make their decision when Kurt tells them they can either phone the police or wait two days to give him a head start, making themselves, in effect, accessories to murder. Fanny, agreeing to help him, makes another key speech. A critic once complained that we know what Hellman is against, but we don't know what she is *for.* Fanny's speech tells us. "I was thinking about Joshua. I was thinking that a few months before he died, we were sitting out there." She points to the terrace. "He said, 'Fanny, the complete American is dying.' I said what do you mean, although I knew what he meant, I always knew. 'A complete man,' he said, 'is a man who wants to know. He wants to know how fast a bird can fly, how thick is the crust of the earth, what made Iago evil, how to plow a field. He knows there is no dignity to a mountain, if there is no dignity to man. You can't put that in a man, but when it's there, put your trust in him!'"

At the end of the play, left alone on stage with David, Fanny says, "We are shaken out of the magnolias, eh?" David asks her if she understands that they are going to be in for trouble. Fanny replies, in a line reminiscent of *The Little Foxes* but spoken to a much different purpose, "I understand it very well. We will manage. I'm not put together with flour paste. And neither are you□I am happy to learn."

Hellman is not an ironist in this play inasmuch as the tone of the whole play is not ironic. Kurt and Sara are presented as admirable characters; Fanny and David are likable, though naive, and rise to the moral occasion. Marthe is treated sympathetically. Even Teck is not presented with the ironic scorn one feels in *The Little Foxes* .

The title is ironic, coming from a German patriotic song, as the Americans learn that they must keep watch on the Potomac. There is ironic dialogue as Teck and Kurt talk over the heads of Fanny and the children in the second act. Fanny makes humorously ironic comments about other people, as does David.

We find an example of "boomerang irony" in Teck's blackmail threat, which causes his death, and again Hellman employs dramatic irony, letting the audience know Teck's

plans, Kurt's work as a member of the resistance movement, Fanny's misgivings about David and Marthe. Again we have the tranquil moment before the climax, as Act II opens ten days after the Muellers' arrival, with Joshua playing baseball with Joseph, the butler; Babette sewing; and Bodo repairing the maid's heating pad, while Kurt plays the piano. Into this warm setting comes Teck, with his barbed remarks; and, as background to his probing questions, we hear the piano, played by a man with broken hands, broken by the Nazis.

Hellman's character development has been so thorough, almost novelistic, that we are prepared to accept Fanny's decision to help Kurt and David's love for Marthe. We have seen Fanny as the autocrat of the breakfast table, but we have also seen that, though a strong woman, given to raising her voice when she doesn't get her way, she is generous, loving, an old-fashioned liberal, of a day when the word meant something. And, before the climactic scene, David has been led to assert himself because of his love for Marthe.

We have seen, as so often we see in a Hellman play, the clash of generations. This time, the conflict is resolved. As Sara says, she comes of good stock, and both generations, shaken out of the magnolias, join to face the danger threatening their family and their country.

By the end of the play each character has committed a definitive act. In a strange essay, Elizabeth Hardwick says that "in most of [Hellman's] plays there are servants, attractive people, money, expensive settings, agreeable surroundings and situations for stars. It is typical of her practice that when she writes in *Watch on the Rhine* of a German refugee coming to America in 1940, he goes not to the Bronx or Queens or even to Fort Washington Avenue, but to a charming country house near Washington."

In a delightful response, Richard Poirier pointed out that, if Hardwick had used her own definition of melodrama, "it might have kept her, too, from complaining that the German refugees in *Watch on the Rhine* did not go to Fort Washington Avenue instead of to a country house near Washington, D.C., where, freed of commuting, they could spend more time in the kind of environment to which Hellman wanted to expose them."

Like Henry James, Hellman is a humanist, not a determinist; she believes in free will and personal responsibility for one's actions or failure to act. Hellman's concern with ethical choices has caused her to study the behavior of the well-to-do because their money gives them the freedom to make moral choices, to deal with moral responsibilities. To send the refugees to the Bronx would have destroyed the theme of the play.

In *Watch on the Rhine* we see a theme with which we are already familiar and which we shall see again in *The Searching Wind* ; our world is the sum of our personal acts. Perhaps this concern with ethical responsibility led Bette Davis to accept the relatively minor role of Sara Müller in the screen version. Miss Davis said that she took the part because she believed *Watch on the Rhine* "had something important to say at a time when it could do the most good."

The film script was included in John Gassner's *Best Film Plays of 1943-1944,* and the film itself was voted the best movie of the year by the New York film critics. The play was successful on tour, as were productions in Europe and London. It was done after the war in Moscow, and in Germany, where it was called *On the Other Side.*

How would the play fare today? How much of the critical fervor was caused by the topicality? How would it strike a "turned-off" generation? In the 1960s Edward Albee announced plans to produce the play, but it was never done. Perhaps Hellman felt that audiences might view *Watch on the Rhine* as support for the war in Vietnam, which she opposed. She said at the time of the Broadway production, "In 'Watch on the Rhine,' I find the play so variously interpreted on every hand that I have decided it is so fluid a script anybody can bring to it any meaning they want to."

Viewed solely as a melodrama, solely as the story of Kurt Müller, the play may be dated. But, if it is the story of some nice, naive, liberal Americans put to the test; if it is a character drama, like *The Autumn Garden* , then it still should have validity. Until, however, a revival allows us to judge for ourselves, we can view it as probably the best of the World War II anti-Nazi plays, or we can agree with Brooks Atkinson that "since Miss Hellman has communicated her thoughts dramatically in terms of articulate human beings, 'Watch on the Rhine' ought to be full of meaning a quarter of a century from now when people are beginning to wonder what life was like in America when the Nazi evil began to creep across the sea."

Source: Katherine Lederer, "The Plays of the 1940s: *Watch on the Rhine,* " in *Lillian Hellman,* Twayne Publishers, 1979, pp. 50-58.

Adaptations

Watch on the Rhine, a Warner Brothers film, was produced in 1943 by Hal Wallis and directed by Herman Shumlin. It starred Bette Davis as Sara and Paul Lukas as Kurt. Dashiell Hammett and Lillian Hellman wrote the screenplay.

Topics for Further Study

Look up the history of the underground movement in Germany. Were there any members who appear to be similar to the characters in the play? What kind of failures and successes did they have?

Research one fascist regime that exists today and compare and contrast it to that of Nazi Germany.

Compose a story about what happened to Kurt after he left the Farrelly house.

Read the "Julia" section in Hellman's *Pentimento* . Julia was a friend of Lillian Hellman's who worked for the underground during World War II. Compare and contrast Julia's character to that of Kurt.

Compare and Contrast

1939: Germany invades Poland and World War II begins.

Today: The conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians heightens tensions in the Middle East.

1941: On December 7, Japan attacks Pearl Harbor and the United States enters World War II. **Today:** Terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center towers in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., on September 11, 2001, are the first large scale attacks on U.S. soil since the attack on Pearl Harbor.

1939: During the war years a strong underground movement emerges that helps stop Nazi aggression through sneak attacks, sabotage, and espionage.

Today: Espionage activities continue between the former Soviet Union and the United States, even after the Soviet Union abolishes its communist government. In recent years, spies have been caught and prosecuted in the United States, in Russia, and in China.

Further Study

Bryer, Jackson, *Conversations with Lillian Hellman,* Literary Conversations Series, University Press of Mississippi, 1986.

Hellman sheds light on her writing process and the themes of her plays.

Griffin, Alice, and Geraldine Thorsten, *Understanding Lillian Hellman,* Understanding Contemporary American Literature Series, University of South Carolina Press, 1999.

Griffin and Thorsten place Hellman's work into historical context.

Podhoretz, Norman, *Ex-Friends: Falling Out with Allen Ginsberg, Lionel & Diana Trilling, Lillian Hellman, Hannah Arendt, and Norman Mailer,* Free Press, 1999.

Podhoretz presents entertaining and insightful snapshots of Hellman's life and those of her contemporaries in the literary scene.

Rollyson, Carl, *Lillian Hellman: Her Legend and Her Legacy,* http://www.iUniverse.com (1999; last accessed September, 2001).

In an examination of newly discovered diaries, letters, and interviews, Rollyson offers insight into Hellman's life and work.

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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.

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.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

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.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

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.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

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

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