AN INTRODUCTION TO DRAMA

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THE NATURE OF DRAMA

Dramatic literature is the record of the attempts of playwrights to express and communicate their ideas about man's hopes, dreams, ideals, feelings , thoughts and experience , and his relationship to society. Drama, thus, deals with the life of man in moments of crisis and anguish, with the most intimate relationships with his innermost thoughts and his deepest loves and hates. with his courage honor, hope, pride, compassion, pity, and sacrifice.

Accordingly, every dramatic piece is built upon a tension between an idea of order and the reality of disorder in society, and thus every detail of the work-the action, the characters, their speeches, the language and the range of themes explored will reflect that tension.

To interpret life has ever been the aim drama , and to this may be attributed its enduring popularity. Through the study, and more specially through the acting, of plays, it is possible to become imaginatively identified with characters whose emotions and experiences have a perfection rarely to be found in life itself. This does not remove the experiences of drama from those of life, but rather brings the two closer together. It is the imperfections of human experiences which make it impossible for one man to understand and identify himself with the personality of another; and drama passes beyond these imperfections to emotions and situations which belong to mankind, although they may be given an intensely individual expression. Thus, drama is not just the

description or discussion of events from real life, i. e., realistic or naturalistic, it is recreation of real life (the imitation of an action, in Aristotle's terms).

As such, drama makes use of all the constituent elements of real activity. These obviously include language and also such things as movement, position, gesture and facial expression. This is definite since drama contains characters conceived as being of separate existence communicating in an imaginary but recognizable society. Drama definitely uses visual as well as spoken means of creating its effect. The suprasegmental features of speech such as stress and intonation are available and vary according to the habits of the individual performer and the changing demands of the situation. Even paralinguistic features like gesture and facial expression can have communicative value and need to be assessed as part of the whole. Drama, of course, dispenses with the' he said 'type of interpolation required in narrative fiction, and, in it, we not only accept but positively require the shifting of registers in order to differentiate characters and their situations.

ELEMENTS OF DRAMA

Drama observes that drama is a social art. The words of the text are not the play, nor is the theatre in which it will eventually be produced. Even a dress rehearsal can hardly be called a performance. A play is the cumulative product of many relationships. Accordingly, drama consists of the following cumulative constituent elements.

1. ARISTOTLE'S CONSTITUENT ELEMENTS

In his The Poetics, Aristotle provides his theorization on tragedy alluding to certain early tragedies performed annually at Athens from the sixth century BC onwards. He defines tragedy as an imitation, through action rather than narration, of a serious, complete, and ample action, by means of language rendered pleasant at different places in the constituent parts by each of the aids, in which imitation there is also affected

through pity and fear its catharsis of these and similar emotion. He also legislates that every tragedy must necessarily have six elements according to which the quality of a tragedy is determined: (1) plot, (2) character, and (3)thought, which tell us what the tragedy proposes to achieve an imitation, (4)spectacle, which tells us how it proposes to do so, and (5)diction and (6) music, which tell us the means to be used.

A. Plot

Plot, to Aristotle, is the most important of all the constituent elements: it is the soul of tragedy. Plot is the arrangement of the incidents for "tragedy is not the portrayal of men, but of action, and the end is a certain kind of action, and not a quality. Men are the certain kind of individuals they are as a result of their character actions. Without action, there could be no tragedy, but there could be tragedy without character .

Not all plays are concomitant to the availability of action; nevertheless we still have tragedies, i. e. William Shakespeare's (564-616) *Hamlet* (1600-1) which is devoid of action as movement and verbal action, and tragicomedies i. e Samuel Beckett' s (b. 1906) *Waiting for Godot* (1952) which is an inaction play : What distinguishes Beckett's play is the absence of almost any action of any kind. It leaves the audience exactly where it finds them.

In this regard, action refers to the nature of the literary appreciation; to the method of the literary work; and to the are manner of its communication. He maintains that there are four types of action the distinction of which is largely based on matters of emphasis, and we might come across some plays containing action of more than one type: acted speech, visual enactment, activity and behavior. **Acted speech** is that the play is written in such a way that when the words are enacted, the whole of the drama is thereby communicated. **Visual enactment** is the kind of action developed from the separate minor actions of the previous form. **Activity** is the action which is often thought to be-only kind of dramatic action: here there is no direct unity of speech and movement, but the movement usually is arranged in a pattern of exiting events and is primary. **Behavior** is meanwhile the kind of action where

the word and movement have no direct and necessary relation, but derive from a conception of probable behavior.

The three most compelling elements in tragedy, insofar as plot is concerned are **reversals, recognition** and **the tragic experience**. A reversal is a change by which the action veers round in the opposite direction, and that in a accordance with the laws of probability or necessity. Recognition is a change by which those marked by the plot for bad for good or bad fortune pass from a state of ignorance into a state knowledge which disposes them either to friendship or enmity towards each other.

There are **five kinds of recognition**. The first, which is the most inartistic but most frequently used by poets because of their lack of inventiveness, is **recognition through signs**. Of course, some are marks the characters are born with while some others are required. The second type is **invented by the poet** and therefore inartistic. The third comes about **through memory**. Here, one is made known through one's reaction upon seeing something. The fourth kind is brought about **through reasoning**. The fifth is a sort of composite recognition which results from a **false inference of one of the characters**. Of all forms of recognition, the best is that which results from the incidents themselves in which the astonishment results from what is probable. The above kinds of recognition are the only ones which are devoid of artificial tokens. The second best type consists of those which are brought about by reasoning. The third element in tragedy insofar as the plot is concerned is the tragic experience: destructive or painful actions such as deaths in plain view, extreme pains, wounds, and the like.

A tragedy is that which has a **beginning, a middle,** and **an end**. A beginning is that which of necessity does not follow anything, while something by nature follows or results from it. On the other hand, an end is that which naturally, of necessity, or most generally follows something else but nothing follows it. A middle is that which follows and is followed by something. Therefore, those who would arrange plots well must not begin just anywhere in the story nor end at just any point, but they must adhere to the criteria laid down(p. 15-6). These three parts of a tragedy are termed exposition, complication and resolution. In the exposition, the reader or audience meets the characters. Here, the author brings dominant ideas announcing the

themes of the text. In complication, problems or mysteries, which have to be solved, test for the character's action and movement. In this section, the playwright makes the plot happen. The complications of the plot explore the complex nature of the characters and the big issues of the text, and put themes and characters under pressure to force them to an outcome. In resolution, an ending after the main crisis, when the complications have been resolved and a concluding state of affairs is worked out. We expect, in this section, the characters to die, marry, or come to terms with their fate: the villain is revealed, the falsely accused is set free, etc.

Each tragedy, to Aristotle, should consist of the above sections. Nevertheless, examining some plays, whether one-act or full-length modern, will clarify that one or more of such parts is missed. In Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, we are introduced to two tramps, and we are left there waiting for Godot to come, i. e. no. middle and no end. Likewise, in his *Act Without Words* (1958), we face every movement of the character, but in vain, i. e. at least there is no end. On the other hand, Francesco Cangiullo's (b. 1888) *There Is No Dog* (1915) has only a beginning.

In addition, Aristotle emphasizes the one plot, but, to him, a plot which can be said to be unified if it merely centers about one person is wrong; for countless things happen to that one person some of which in no way constitute a unit. In just the same way, there are many actions of an individual which do not constitute a single action. Therefore, a unified imitation is an imitation of a single thing, in the same way the plot in tragedy, since it is an imitation of an action, must deal with that action and with the whole of it; and the different parts of the action must be so related to each other that if any part is changed or taken away, the whole will be altered and disturbed. For anything whose presence or absence makes no discernible difference is no essential part of the whole.

In the process of numerating types of plot, Aristotle mentions three types: **episodic, simple and complex**. The episodic, which is the worst, determines an arrangement of the episodes according to the law of probability and necessity. Poor poets make such plots because of their poor ability ; good poets make them on account of the actors. But tragedies are imitations not only of actions which are complete but of

such as inspire pity and fear; and actions tend to inspire most pity and fear whenever they happen contrary to expectation and are brought about one by the other. For anything so brought about will appear more wonderful than if it happens spontaneously or by chance since of the things which happen by chance, those seem to excite more wonder which appear to have happened in accordance with some design. A simple action is one which is single and continuous and one whose change of fortune comes about without a recognition scene. A complex action is one whose change of fortune is brought about by a recognition scene, or both. These recognitions must grow out of the arrangement of the plot itself by its being so constructed that each succeeding incident happens necessarily or according to probability from what has happened previously; for it makes a great deal of difference whether the incidents happen because of what has preceded merely after it. According to Aristotle, a tragedy is regularly divided into separate parts: **prologue, episode, exode,** and **choral odes (parodus** and **stasima**). These parts are common to all tragedies, and some particular ones have in addition songs from the stage and commoi. The prologue is the entire part of the tragedy which precedes the entrance ode of the chorus. An episode is that entire part of the tragedy which comes between choral odes. An exode is that entire part of the tragedy after which there is no choral ode. The parodus is the first complete ode of the chorus. A stasimonis a song of the chorus without anapests and trochaics. A commus is a lamentation between the chorus and one or more of the actors on the stage. In this regard, the chorus, to Aristotle, should be regarded as one of the actors, as a constituent part of the whole and should share in the action. Sometimes, the choral odes have no more connection with their plot than with some other tragedy. Consequently, their choral odes become interpolations. The chorus is a group of characters who represent ordinary people in their attitudes to the action which they witness as bystanders, and on which they comment. Before its special use in the theatre, the chorus had been participants in Greek religious festivals, dancing and chanting; thus the connection of certain poetic terms and forms, such as the strophe, and the ode, with chorus conventions is clear. The chorus , however, is fairly rare in modern drama though choral characters are common enough. Two plays which do imitate the Greek convention quite closely are John Milton's (1608-

74)closet drama *Samson Agonistes* (1671)and T. S. Eliot's (b. 1888) *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935).

Aristotle conceived of tragedies as having two types of ending: the correct and double. The correct ending is one which is most tragic, and one in which a change of fortune happens from good to bad, but not from bad to good. The double ending, by definition, has a twofold arrangement, and has a different ending for the good and the bad characters. But it is the weak character of the spectators which makes this seem the best type of plot; for the poets, as they write, follow the wishes of the spectators. But the pleasure this type of plot gives is inherent in comedy but foreign to tragedy ; for in comedy those who are enemies, according to the plot, become friends at the end and go off stage without anyone's being killed by anybody.

To Aristotle The aim of the plot is **catharsis**, i. e the double feeling of pity and fear on the part of the audience. In the true performance of a tragedy, the crude emotions of the audience were absorbed into the perfect expression of these emotions in the drama, where they are cleansed and purified of their imperfections. Definitely, Aristotle wished to find a way of justifying literature against Plato's argument that it appealed only to the feelings and did nothing to engage the audience's or reader's power of reasoning. Catharsis definitely occurs because of the involvement between the audience and the characters on the stage. On the other hand, to Erwin Piscator and Bertolt Brecht (1898-956), the initiators of epic theatre, the audience , in the process of watching a play , are not seeing life but they are watching a play and they are supposed to reason things out and not to be swept away by feeling for an illusion: this is Brecht's deliberate alienation effect. Brecht's *Three penny Opera* (1929)and *Mother Courage and Her Children* (1941) are notable examples of this kind of writing. which he used to expound his Marxist political views.

In sum, as tragedy is an imitation of an action, it entails having one action and coherent various plot incidents since a removing of one incident can lead to misachieving unity . The best plot is then one which constitutes of a single story. That is why, Aristotle legislates a law of action or plot having one action.

B. Character

By Character, Aristotle means that by which we determine what kinds of men are being presented, and since tragedy is an imitation of action and is for that reason principally concerned with characters in action. As such, characters are the people in a text; they are part of ordinary life, and they are complex people whose feelings and experiences bring to life the big, dominant issues of the dramatic text. The tragic hero, to Aristotle, is a man of much glory and good fortune who is not too superior in excellence and uprightness and yet does not come into his misfortune because positive of baseness and rascality but through some inadequacy or positive fault. In other words, the downfall of a tragic hero should not be caused by evil, but by hamartia (error). Tragic flaw suggests imperfection of character, rather than a mistake of action. Shakespeare's tragic heroes do often manifest a flawed character, i. e. ' jealousy' in *Othello* (1604), 'hesitation' in *Hamlet*, 'illegal ambition' in *Macbeth* (1616), etc. But this is not characteristic of all tragedies, however.

In regard to character in tragedy, four qualities must be aimed at. The first and foremost is that it be **good**. And the character will be good if the choice of the speaker or doer is a good one. The second quality is the character's **fitting as manly**. The third quality required of a character in tragedy is **likeness to the traditional character** being portrayed. The fourth quality is **consistency** even in the sense of consistently inconsistent. Nevertheless, not all of these qualities, sometimes none, are present in some Shakespearean and modern tragic heroes. "Macbeth" in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, for instance, is a sort of tragic hero in which at least three of those qualities are absent, i. e. good, fitting and likeness. "Hamlet" in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* lacks all the four qualities.

Character to Aristotle is not as important as plot in tragedy as there are plays which are without characters. For clarifying this point, Aristotle alluded to Greek tragedy and we to English. In Cangiullo's *There Is No Dog*, there is a character in the modern sense, not in the classical, i. e. a dog.

Generally, characters are of two types: **round and flat**. A round character is one which changes and develops in the course of the play, as opposed to the flat character which does not. A round character in drama will be presented with as much complexity and detail of

motivation and behavior as someone met with in real life. Flat characters will be built upon a single idea or quality. This distinction, which is based on whether the character is fully developed or not , is not always clear-cut: at certain types of plays, it is not easy to determine whether a particular character is round or flat. One-act plays, because of conciseness, brevity and compression, provide many examples for this claim. It is not easy, for instance, to regard "he", "she" or "Her husband " in G. B. Shaw's (1856-950) *How He Lied to Her Husband* (1904) as flat or round characters . All of the above characters are not fully developed in the play.

Likewise the criterion for considering a certain character to be round in absurd drama, particularly one-act plays, is not the full development of the character but rather its being concentrated upon in plot. ' 'Rose" in Harold Pinter's (b. 1930) *The room* (1957), for example, is a complicated character whose past, present and future is not predicated to all the characters in the same play as well as to us spectators or readers. Nevertheless, it is a round character . On the other hand , it is a remarkable characteristic of full- length plays. e. g. tragedies, comedies, etc. to fully develop particular characters to be easily diagnosed as round. In the 'weltanschauung (philosophy) of both absurd drama and angry theatre i. e. Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and John Osborne's (b. 1929) *Look Back in Anger* (1956), it is straightforward to diagnose "Estragon" and "Vladmir", and "Jimmy", "Alison " and "Cliff" as round characters.

Characters can also be divided to **protagonists (heroes) and antagonists (villains)**. The protagonist is the principal, leading character in play. Strictly speaking, plays "can have only one protagonist, clearly the focus of major interest, perhaps in conflict with an antagonist". The antagonist is the chief opponent of the hero. Thus, "Hamlet" and "Othello ", and "Claudius" and "Iago", for instance, are the protagonists and antagonists in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *Othello* respectively.

Sometimes, in comedy from the earliest times and the middle or working –class protagonists of modern tragedies, the protagonist for example is unheroic and ordinary: a character whose attractiveness or interest consists in the inability to perform deeds of bravery, courage or generosity, namely, anti-hero. Examples of such anti-heroes are so

many: "Jimmy" in Osborne's Look Back in Anger, 'Willy Loman" In Arthur Miller's(b. 1915) *Death of a Salesman* (1949), etc. might be called anti-heroes to distinguish them from the kings, princes and noblemen who figured in classical drama. This view of making heroes down to earth is orientated by the spread of the interest in the 'common citizen' in modern literature. Thus, we find 'tramps' expressing their ' weltschmerz ' as heroes, i. e. Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. In some cases, the antagonist is a supernatural power, e. g. the 'sea' in John Millington Synge's (1871-909) *Riders to the Sea*, (1904). Surprisingly, a protagonist can also be an antagonist, e. g. "Macbeth" in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is both a protagonist and the antagonist.

At other times mainly in comedy as well as some modern dramas, heroines take principal roles, i. e. they are the leading characters. Shakespeare's romantic comedies are well-known for their main concentration, as far as plot, theme as well as characterization are concerned, on heroines, i. e. "Rosalind", "Viola " and "Portia" in Shakespeare's *As you like it* (1599), *Twelfth Night* (1601-2), and *The Merchant of Venice (1596-7)* respectively. Similarly "Maurya" is the principal character in Synge's *Riders to the Sea*. 'Ordinary' plays exhibit hero-heroine presence; the heroine as being subsidiary to the plot: "Hamlet- Ophelia ", "Macbeth-Lady Macbeth ", "JimmyAlison", etc. in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, and Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, for instance. This hero-heroine presence is not always so straightforward as this might frequently be assumed, e. g. "Maurya" is the heroine of Synge's *Riders to the Sea* and there is no hero beside her, "Mrs x" is the same in August Strindberg's (1849912) *The Stronger* "Estragon " and "Vladmir" are without heroines in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, etc.: playwrights can express their philosophical positions sometimes via characterization.

Clowns and fools are familiar characters in modern literature. The clown, as defined in the Encyclopedia Britannica is "a familiar comic character who has a distinctive make-up and performs a graphic humour, absurd situations and rigorous physical action". The fool is a person who is employed in courts to amuse dukes and kings. Fools are to be distinguished from clowns and witty servants. Clowns tend to be rural or urban; fools belong to the courts of nobles and kings. Shakespeare's clowns, such as "Costand", "Launce", "Launcelot Gobbo", "Dogberry

", are to be distinguished from his intelligent witty professional fools or jesters, such as "Touchstone", "Fesk", and Lear's "fool"'. In addition, there are often quick -witted servants such as the Dromiotwins, speed, Tranio and Grumio. These are like their counterparts are often called clowns or fools. Lear's " fool" in Shakespeare's *king Lear* (1605) is the chief Shakespearean fool, with an intelligent and fairly warning function in recognizing and commenting on his master's folly, "Touchstone" in Shakespeare's *As You Like It* does not only jest, but he also tells wisdom (See also: Berry, 1972: 47), and this expresses a Shakespearean belief that wisdom is often found in the mouth of a fool and that folly is universal.

Clowns and fools have something to do with characters sometimes being as caricatures. A **caricature** is generally a grotesque or ludicrous rendering of character, achieved by the exaggeration of personality traits. In the visual arts, it is easy to distinguish a caricature from a realistic portrait, insofar as it departs from an exact and credible reproduction of the human form. In literature, it is more difficult to know to what extant an author wants a character to be understood as a caricature. Caricatures are most frequent in comic works and it is not infrequent to find caricatures in tragedies. " Sir Andrew Aguecheck", "Sir Toby Bekh" and "Malvdio" in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* are caricatures : the first two are dissipated drunks, the third a selfrighteous puritan in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, "Osric", the ridiculous courtier is an example of caricature in tragedies.

C. Thought

Thought is third element of tragedy to Aristotle. It is that which manifests itself in what all the characters say when they present an argument or even make evident an opinion. It is the thinking ability of the characters, which is the ability to say what is possible within the limits of the situation and what is fitting. Thought manifests itself in what the characters say as they prove or disprove something or make evident something universal. Underthought is subsumed under all those things which must be affected by speech, such as presentation of a case, disproving a charge or ameliorating a situation, arousing the tragic elements of fear, pity, anger, and the like, and also curtailing and enlarging matters. It is evident that one must draw from the same

principles also in their actions whenever it is necessary to produce what is pitiful, fearful, great or probable.

D. Spectacle

Spectacle, the fourth element of tragedy to Aristotle, is one which tells us how it proposes to achieve an imitation of action. It is quite appealing and is the most inartistic and has the least affinity with poetry; for the essential power of tragedy does not depend upon the presentation and the actors. Moreover, for achieving the effects of spectacle, the art of the mechanic of stage properties is more competent than the art of poetry.

E. Diction

By diction, Aristotle means an expression of thought by means of language. It is also the choice of words in a work of literature; the kind of vocabulary used. The diction of a work may by simple or elaborate, colloquial or formal, racy or dignified, latinate or Anglosaxon in derivation, literal or full of figurative language, exact or vague, densely packed with nouns, floridly adjectival or full of active verbs, etc.

The whole diction consists of letters, syllables, binding words joining words, nouns, verbs, inflection, and clauses and sentences. The function of diction, to Aristotle, is to make clear what is said and to lift it above the level of the ordinary. A diction which uses familiar words is the clearest, but it is also ordinary. Therefore, a writer must somehow get a proper mixture of rare words and of those with transferred meanings; this will lend a tone of professional skill and elevation to the diction, while the familiar words will make for clarity. The lengthening, shortening and altering of words contributes most to clarity of diction and to expression which is above the ordinary; for it will produce something above the ordinary on account of its being different from the familiar and the customary.

F. Music

Music, along with diction, is the means to be used for achieving an imitation of action; it has the greatest enriching written wholly or partly in poetry, including some poems and power. Music includes, in this

context, the plays being songs in the dramatic work, and physical music using instruments to be in harmony with the incidents of plays. Music is important, for instance, in some Shakespearean works through all the above types of music implementation. Shakespeare wrote 124 beautiful songs for his plays. These were all set to music in his lifetime; over the centuries, many composers (notably Schubert) have given them new musical settings. In *The Tempest*(1611), "Aril", a delicate invisible spirit, sings three songs: in I, 2, 11; II, 1, 20; V, 1, 40. In *Twelfth Night* (II, 3, 26), we find a quaint love song. In *As You Like It* (II, 5, 1-8)the "Amiens" sing to the banished Duke in the Forest of Arden.

2. OTHER ELEMENTS

Drama constitutes of other elements in addition to those listed by Aristotle in The Poetics:

A. Theme

Theme is the abstract subject of a work; its central idea or ideas which may or may not be explicit or obvious. Themes may range, be multiple within each work, but should be contributing to the main plot or subplots of the work. A theme is not a summary of the story. Literature is about ordinary life so the big themes in literature are the important subjects and experiences of public and private lives: love, death, marriage, freedom, hope, despair, power, war, revenge, evil, and so on. So, anything which is a subject in life can become a theme in literature.

B. Setting

The setting, the 'mise en scene', of a theatrical production includes scenery, properties, etc. The setting also refers to the time and place in which a play takes place. Suitable costume and props also assist the audience to recognize the work in a straight way. The setting may be crucially significant since writers may use it to convey information about temperament of the characters themselves symbolically or adopting the characters' views towards it. The scenery, i. e. the decorations on the stage of a theatre inside a house or in the countryside, for example, helps to create an illusion that it is a particular place and it also helps to provide

information about the characters' way of life and their social and economic states. **Scenery** is not necessarily realistic, and plays may be performed with very little or no scenery. In Strindberg's *The Stronger*, the scenery consists of only "two small iron tables , a red worsted shag sofa, and some chairs" in corner of a women's café. In Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, the setting highly symbolic: A country road, a tree, evening.

C. Audience

The audience is definitely an element of drama; this is indirectly mentioned by Aristotle since the effect of tragedy, i. e. catharsis, depends on purging the audience's emotions of pity and fear. The differentiation of comedy from tragedy is initiated by recognizing the difference in the kind of emotional response that the two forms excite in us, audience. Shakespeare's audience, for instance, included almost all ranks of society, except the lowest and poorest. The private theatres created for better-off people. And it seems clear that the London audience was alert and intelligent, and one that became increasingly so, if we may take as evidence Shakespeare's increasingly subtlety and complexity, and the cruder but still complex and often learned plays of his Jacobean contemporaries and successors.

D. Stage

The stage is considered an element of drama as plays are primarily written for performance. Playhouses and stages have developed a great deal. Plays were acted out in temples and inn-yards. The first building specially built for a theatre and probably designed on the modal of the inn-yards with galleries, where plays had been performed, was The Theatre, built in 1576. And because of the hostility of the Corporation of London to drama, believing it to attract crime and lawlessness as well as crowds and the possibility of spreading diseases so theaters were built outside the city's walled boundary. The Globe theater was built in 1598-9, The Rose (1587), The Hope (1614) and The Swan (1595).

The stage in the Elizabethan theatre, for example, was a raised bare platform, projecting to some distance into the audience. It was surrounded on all sides by the audience. The central part of the theatre was unroofed. The plays were given by day-light. There was no painted

scenery or curtain. At the back of the stage was a wall, with decorative columns and architecture, and there was one large door immediately in the middle of the wall and a small door either side. Designed this way, the Elizabethan stage gave every opportunity rapid action. Several scenes could follow quickly after each other without a single break in the continuity of the play.

E. Lighting

Lighting is an important element of theatre making. It helps create and sustain illusion in the audience. Elizabethan stages were lit by suspended hoops of candles. Little variety of effect was possible, players were in danger from hot wax, but the light given was pleasing and mellow. The hoops could be retracted into the files producing effects of varying intensity, but the imagination boggles at the fire hazard. Candles were also used as footlight.

TYPES OF DRAMA

Throughout the history of drama, a variety of types appears. These miscellaneous types emerge as a result of place of origin, such as miracle and morality plays; the type of emotional effect they bring in the audience, e. g. tragedy, comedy, etc. ; the appearance of literary movements such as realism, naturalism, imagism, expressionism, etc.; the emergence of an economic movement such as marxism which leads to Brecht's epic theatre; the need for the revival of an old type such as Eliot's verse drama; the circumstances of the modern age, such as absurd drama, angry theatre, etc.; the need for compression, such as the one-act play; etc. These and other types are clarified below:

1. Religious Drama

The term religious drama conveys all plays which have directly religion as a theme; this includes miracle plays, mystery and morality plays. The place of origin is the Christian church, Monks and priests were concerned, starting from the Norman Conquest, with stabilizing the Christian beliefs since people at that time could neither read nor write. Plays concerned with Christ's sacrifice and resurrection were celebrated through dramatic means. These stories which were taken from the Bible were acted in a simple way in the church by the monks and this proved popular that more and more of the Bible was put in dramatic form.

Early religious drama had been taken from the Bible, acted by the monks and inside the church. A step forward in this type of drama is in the mystery plays which were acted by trade-guilds, or craft-guilds. Each guild would choose an episode from the Bible, and the episode would usually be appropriate to the craft or trade practiced. Each guild had its own decorated cart, called a 'pageant', a sort of portable stage to be dragged through the town, set up at different spots, and to its shed in the end.

An advanced stage in religious drama happened. Then, some playwrights introduced certain stories which were not taken from the Bible and the monks refused to act them in the church , viz., the **miracle plays**. Such plays were then acted outside the church; and developed in a much freer way. Plays about the Gospel characters and the miracles of the saints more elaborate, demanded more stage managing, eventually turned into complete presentations divorced from the ritual of the church. In fact, they moved out of the church building , into the churchyard, and then into the t own itself . With the emergence of the miracle plays, the process of secularization began - control and participation by the non-religious, by the man in the street as opposed to the priest in the church.

Secularization in drama was then accumulated through the development of a new kind of religious or semi-religious play -the **morality**. The morality was not a guild play and it did not take as its subject a story from the Bible. Instead, it tried to teach a moral lesson through allegory by presenting abstract ideas as though they were real people. The morality is a drama "the characters of which are allegorical, abstract or symbolical and the story which is intended to convey a lesson for the better conduct human life. To present the sins and morals allegorically implies that supernatural or magical powers were conceived, at that time, of assuming material shapes and liable to intrude in man's life and that the moral law is not merely man-made and that moral choice is not a human idiosyncrasy, but has a universal validity.

The character of the hero, in the morality, was taken for granted, and interest arouses "from seeing how the life of a great man could end in disaster even though his intentions and motives might be founded on a high endeavor towards what he felt to be a worthily aim. The interest was not so much in a man's misfortunes as in the causes of those misfortunes. A man's character is determined by his thoughts. Most people have the feeling, at some time in their life, that their mind is in two parts, each part urging them to a different course of action. The medieval playwrights pretended that these contrary wishes or impulses of the mind were real people, and brought them on the stage. There were the evil impulses, viz., the Seven Deadly Sins: Pride, Envy, sloth, Intemperance, Avarice, Anger and lust, and the Seven Moral Virtues:

Faith, Hope, Charity, Justice, Prudence, Temperance and Fortitude. The characters proper to allegory are impulses, moods, attitudes and states of mind, qualities, virtues and vices, physical and mental conditions, such as old age and youth, etc.

The best known example and the most appealing of surviving fifteen-century morality plays is *Everyman*. It was written about 1500 and possibly based on a Dutch original called Elerlijk. This play is a conflict between flesh and spirit as taught by theologies. It takes its theme the moments when death is eminent, and shows what a revolution "Everyman" has to make of the things in his life which had once seemed all important.

2. Tragedy

Tragedy traces the career and downfall of an individual, and shows in this downfall both the capacities and the limitations of human life. Apart of these, definitions of tragedy are both difficult and unsatisfactory. The tragic as distinguished from the comic is a matter of the point of view from which the dramatist looks at his material. Another valid way of looking at tragedy is to recognize the difference in the kind of emotional response that the two forms of literature excite in us, the audience. Such emotional response, ranges between unhappiness, in tragedy, and happiness in comedy. Tragedy is concerned with eternal values; comedy with temporal.

The constituent elements of tragedy, as said earlier, are: plot, character, thought, spectacle, diction and music. These elements are said to pursue the imitation of the action to purgate the audience's emotions of pity and fear which is the function or tragedy to Aristotle. Aristotle, depending upon the plot types, differentiates four kinds of tragedies: complex tragedies which are wholly recognition; tragedies of suffering; character tragedies and tragedies depending, upon spectacle.

In *The Poetics*, Aristotle made certain description comments which came to be known as the dramatic **unities of action, time** and **space** and thus considered rules for the proper construction of tragedies. As for the unity of time, Aristotle remarks that the usual practice of tragedy was to confine itself, so far as possible, to the action of twenty –four years. The unity of place obliges the dramatist not to allow the action

to take place in two remote places having the stricture of time in consideration. The dramatist has also to concentrate on one plot and should have no sub-plots, i. e. unity of action. Likewise, the action should take place within 24 hours. In fact, violation of such unities is frequently done particularly in Shakespearean and modern drama. Most Shakespearean tragedies have one main plot and a number of subplots. And, for instance, in sending "Hamlet" to England, in *Hamlet*, the king of Denmark, manipulated by Shakespeare, was attempting to violate the unity of place and consequently that of action.

Frequently linked with such cited unities is the violence of tragedy by lining it to comedy, i. e. be it tragi-comic. The desire for comic relief, for instance, on the part of an audience is a permanent craving of human nature and a necessity of the time for a hack playwright. The university wits, viz., Robert Greene (1560-92), John Lyly (1554-606), Thomas Kyd (1558-94) and Christopher Marlowe (156493) having university education, were brought into contact with the- well-known Greek and Roman tragedies. And accordingly, they, particularly Marlowe, brought to English drama a new dimension: to give to the striving within the mind of man an expression as tremendous as that which the classical dramatists had given to the striving of man against Fate.

In the initiation and development of English drama, Seneca, the first century AD stoic Roman philosopher, exerted a huge influence. Seneca is credited with adapting nine Greek tragedies, translated into English in 1581, and thus making a strong influence on English drama remarkably in the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, the great age of tragedy. These nine tragedies are characterized by concentration on imparting atmosphere and action through the language by declamatory passages, by stichomything the theme of revenge and by certain stereotyped figures, such as messenger reporting disasters, the ghost, and the traditional dramatic five-act structure based on the Senecan model. In sum, Seneca's contribution to English drama is in two folds: He provides the model both for the formal classical tragedy with five acts and elaborate style, for example Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton's *Gorboduc* (1561), and for the popular revenge tragedies. Nevertheless, Senecan plays were probably not meant to be performed on stage. Shakespearean and naturalistic tragedies affected by Seneca in addition

to revenge tragedies. Unlike Seneca, Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights preferred to show the horrors of revenge on the stage.

3. Revenge Tragedy

Revenge tragedy is a minor genre which is especially associated with Seneca. This special form of tragedy on the protagonist's pursuit of vengeance against those who have done him wrong; such plays often concentrate on the moral confusion caused by the need to answer evil by evil. Such tragedies of blood are full of horrific violent incidents and sensational elements, in which quest for vengeance leads to a bloodthirsty Climax. Four examples are often cited as ones for revenge tragedians: Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy (1586), Shakespeare's Hamlet, and John Webster's (1580 -630). The white Devil (1608) and The Duchess of Malfi (1614). Notably, all the above examples show the influence of Seneca. But in specific terms, kyd is the father of revenge tragedy and Hamlet is its notable example.

Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* is an early Elizabethan tragedy which had sounded dark depths of treachery and supernatural evil. Old "Hieronimo" avenges his murdered son in a play presided over by a ghost and by the figure of revenge that directs the action like a god. As it is clear in this passage from the play, gloomy but exultant, the avenger paid the price of his own crimes in exacting blood for blood:

I would give all, ay and my soul to boot But
I would see thee ride in this red pool.

(IV, 4: 205: -6)

Senecan and kyd's revenge tragedies are very different: Whereas Seneca's plays are largely verbal, kyd's work is behind the dream of words. As such, Seneca's actual work has an indirect influence in which violent actions never shown on the stage, but only reported by the reported by the characters.

Webster's *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi* are based on actual events in the recent past as transmitted through popular Italian novellas. What gives them their tragic intensity is the atmosphere of brooding darkness which pervades them and the eloquent dignity with which Webster's central figures face their impending death. "Vitoria", "Flamineo "and the "Duchess of Malfi " find in their last moments

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conventions. Nevertheless, most comedies from the Elizabethan until the present time share certain features: They do not concentrate on the fortunes of an individual but interest is spread over a group of people; they deal with low life, and humble people rather than with kings(though not exclusively); their plots are usually elaborate, involve from the possibility of disaster towards a happy ending, misunderstandings and deceptions, and move often symbolised by a wedding. A comic situation is one which to a comic character seems dangerous, but which implies no great threat audience or humanity in general is a typical comic situation.

Comedy is an ancient form dating to the fifth century BC. It probably originated in the seasonal festivities which were part of the Dionysiac fertility cult. By the end of the fifth century BC, individual playwrights had already emerged: Aristophanes is the most notable. His plays such as *The Frogs* and *Lyisistrate* combine lyrical poetry, buffoonery, satire and fantastical plots and characters. Another highly prized playwright of comedies was Menandr: his plays are only known because of his strong influence on the Roman playwrights Plautus and Terence. Their comedies are more social in their forms, contain songs and have elaborate plots, involving stock characters, such as the bragging soldier, spendthrift young men, willy servants and so on.

The language of comedy is fluent and articulate: characters do not feel a need to develop exploratory, stretching uses of language to account for themselves and the world around them, but are satisfied that the relationships between them and the world are simple and comprehensible. The comic character, unlike the tragic hero, does not face up to the task of reconciling inconstancies in his own nature. He is, however, more than willing to face up to the task, of defending himself, particularly in the cut-and-thrust of dramatic dialogue. Comic characters may be fools, but are capable of speaking the same language as their opponents. Comic dialogue is frequently a battle which needs evenly balanced opponents to sustain its momentum. With dialogue and characterization as with other aspects of comedy, it is perhaps by examining an author's capacity to generate pace and the repetitiveness or increasing subtlety of the ways in which he exploits it, that one can arrive at an assessment of him as a comic dramatist.

The true beginning of the English comedy starts with the interludes of the mystery and morality plays, frequently farcical. The **interlude** is a short dramatic entertainment, probably produced during a feast, or between the acts of play. These are many extant, dating from the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and ranging in subject matter from farce to something close to the morality plays. Its weakness lies in the absence of material for development of plot and theme. Generally, the interlude is the direct descendant of the older morality plays. The main difference between them lies, not in the theme, but in place and occasion of performance as the interlude was adapted to indoor performance in private houses, inns and at courts.

With this form of plays, viz, the interlude, such names appear: Rastal, Bale, Henry Medwall and John Heywood (1497-580). Rastal wrote *Gentleness and Nobility* and *Calisto and Melibea* which are plays of disputation on moral themes. Bale in his interlude of *God's Promises* argues that man cannot achieve salvation through good works, but only the power of Christ's scarifies, only be the grace that God bestows freely. Medwall writes *Fulgens and Lucrece* which is a sort of dramatized discussion of the nature of true nobility. It is the first English play to have a title suggesting an Elizabethan play.

The most enjoyable of all the interlude dramatists is John Heywood; he wrote several interludes without having instructive purpose. In the courser force *The Four P's*(1520), a Palmer, a Pardoner, a Pothecary and a Pedlar do nothing more than talk, but their purpose is only to see who can tell the biggest lie. In *The play of the Weather* (1553), a courtly disputation, a number of people have asked Jupiter for the kind of weather they prefer to be granted all the time; but the various requests are contradictory and no two people agree, and so things are left as they are. The influence of the Latin models of comedy, i. e. Plautus and Terence, on the interlude can be seen in Nicholas Udall's (1505-56)*Ralph Roister Doister* (1553). In this play, much of the humor parallels the interlude, and the classical model helped Udall to build up a full-length play, instead of a comic dialogue dependent on a few tenuous situations. This play is arranged into five acts and several scenes, following the Raman pattern, and the main character "Ralf" is modeled on the boastful soldier of Plautus.

Garmmer Gurton's Needle (1575, possibly written by a Cambridge scholar, William Stevenson) is a farcical tale which is considered the first extant English comedy. The central situation is trivial-the loss and discovery of a needle, but the dramatist had a gift for dialogue and distinct power in creating characters. This play also owes something to the Roman comedies in its skilful plot-construction .

The most brilliant intelligence to practise comedy before Shakespeare and the developer of a more sophisticated kind of comedy is John Lyly. Lyly's style in which he wrote his comedies is euphuistican elaborate-prose style which is full of alliteration. His plays are: *Campase* (1584); *Sapho and Phao* (1584) *Gallathea* (1585); *Endimion (1588); Midas* (1589); *Mother Bomi* and *Love's Metamorphoses* (1590); and *The Woman in the Moon* (1594). Lyly's originality and invention are remarkable: he combined the realistic farce, the complexity of Latin comedy, and the allegory of the morality plays into a new design, suffused with a gentle and dreamlike romanticism, and his greatest achievement lay in the wit of his dialogue. Accordingly, Lyly naturalized some valuable dramatic conventions from which Shakespeare and others profited-notably; the use of stock characters much fantasticated and embellished by him from Latin comedy.

Both George Peele (1558-97) and Robert Greene are comic specialists, though not making a good imprint on English comedy. Peele is responsible for one of the most delightful of the preShakespearean comedies. His *The Old Wives' Tale* is considered one of the early attempts at dramatic satire of those romantic tales of enchantment and chivalry. Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Burtgay* is clearly defined in the use of the clown and has freshness and charm and humour.

To George Meredith, the nineteenth century writer, in *The Idea of comedy* (1877), true comedy has for its own business to awaken thoughtful laughter. Thus, high comedy, in contrast to low comedy, rests fundamentally on thoughtful appreciation contrasted with unthinking, spontaneous laughter.

In Shakespeare, there is often, a mixture: of low and high comedy, which is significant of the mixture of squalor and splendor, barbarity and culture in the Elizabethan era. Shakespeare's high comedy is frequently called **romantic comedy** and the phrase is an indication of the

unique quality of Shakespearean comedy. If there is any type of drama which Shakespeare may be said to have created, it is romantic comedy.

In his romantic comedies, Shakespeare built on foundations of the old classical comedy of satire and manners a new comedy of romance and love. He accommodated romance, and in particular a romantic conception of love. There is cheer optimism: Shakespeare raises no problems: he sweetens our feeling towards humanity and lursens away to the restful land of romance. His comedies are of two tones, they are comic as well as romantic, and there is always something to laugh at even in the love stories of the novelty and gentry.

Romantic comic plays are characterized by the following (Betti, 2013: 22):

1. It is a new type of comedy, which- is full of romance and love. Shakespeare , elaborates upon a romantic conception of love. There is cheer optimism: He raises no problems and he sweetens the audience's feeling towards humanity. His comedies are both romantic and comic.

2. The male character is unimportant compared to the female one in all his four romantic comedies (The Merchant of Venice, Much Ado about Nothing, As You Like It and Twelfth Night).

3. In all the four romantic comedies, there are two female characters associated with each other such as Viola and Olivia in the text under study.

4. There is a specific employment of clowns and f fools. In our text, Feste does not only invoke laughter in us, but also gives us wisdom and proves that he is wise. A good proof for this is Feste's meeting with "Olivia in our text. He proves her to be a fool.

5. There is the use of music and songs in these comedies.

6. There is the employment of disguise as a technique, which brings irony and dramatic irony.

From 1592 to 1601, Shakespeare wrote his most successful romantic comedies: *The Merchant of Venice, Much Ado About Nothing* (1598-9), *As you Like It* and *Twelfth Night*. And by a full scrutiny of such plays, certain features are arrived at. First, in each of the four plays, the male character is unimportant in compared to "Rosalind", in *As You like It* for instance. In all these plays, there are two female characters associated with each other in the same manner, as are "Nerissa "and "Portia "in *The Merchant of Venice*; " Rosalind" and """Celia "and "Portia " in *The Merchant of Venice*; "Rosalind " and "Celia" in *As You Like It*; "Viola " and "Olivia "in *Twelfth Night*; etc.

Second, there is a specific employment of clowns or fools i. e. "Touchstone" in *As You Like It*. The clown should provide amusement annexed to ready wit. Third, Shakespeare uses music and songs frequently in his romantic comedies, i. e. *As You Like It, The Merchant of Venice*. Fourth, all Shakespeare's romantic comedies have disguise as a technique. The heroines are always in disguise: *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (1594); *The Taming of the Shrew* (1593-4); *The Merchant of Venice; Much Ado About Nothing; As You Like It; The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1597); *All's W that Ends Well* (1602-3); *Measure for Measure* (1604); *and The Tempest* (1611). By disguise, Shakespeare keeps the audience informed of what is hidden from some or all of the characters on the stage. The audience know that "Portia" in *The Merchant of Venice* is disguised as a lawyer and that "Shylock" will be foiled; etc., and the only exception to this is that in *The Winter's Tale* (1610-11), the audience are allowed to suppose that "Hermione" is dead.

Ben Jonson (1574-637), Shakespeare's greatest contemporary, friend and rival, developed a kind of comedy which lasted for some years, viz., the **comedy of humor** or satiric comedy. This method of comedy was linked to a medical theory of the time, which said that man's temperament was determined by the proportion of four fluids or humors in his body. There was the sanguine humor, the choleric, the phlegmatic, and the melancholic. Too much of any of them made man eccentric or humrous. The characters are thus types not individuals. As such, Jonson's comedies are realities as he is interested in making them out of the situations of his own time: he is always contemporary in his themes and setting.

Of all Jonson's comedies; i. e. *Volpone, The Alchemist,*

Bartholomews Fair, The Silent Woman, Every Man in His Humour (1598) *and Everyman Out of His Humour (1599), Every Man in His Humour* Seems to be little more than a demonstration of the theory.

The comedy of manners (restoration comedy insofar as the historical periods are concerned) focuses on the love intrigues of cynical and sophisticated youngaristocrates in high society: it relies heavily on verbal wit. The audience, hence, laugh not at the characters themselves, but at the way they express themselves. This type of comedy reaches its zenith in the restoration age and eighteenth century. People, in restoration comedies, live in a society which obeys very finite rules and follows well-ordered conventions. Accordingly, any violation of such rules causes the audience to laugh. William Congreve (1670-729), for instance, in his *The Old Bachelor* (1693), *The Double Dealer* (1694), *Love for Love* (1695), and *The Way of the World* (1700), laughed at the way wives treated their husbands, at the trivial round of social observances and idle gossip with people of good sense were sometimes content so occupy their time.

In this regard Sheridan's (1751-816), comedy of manners is often cited, alongside Oscar Wilde's (1954 - 900). In Sheridan's three comedies; *The Rivals* (1775), *The School for Scandal* (1777) and *The Critic* (1779); something of the of restoration dialogue returned into comedy, a genial and romantic atmosphere is created and his characters are gayful and firmly presented. Similarly, in Wilde's four comedies; *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892), *A Woman of No Importance* (1893), *An Ideal Husband* (1895) and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), comedy of worth rank to Sheridan is presented and one which revives Sheridan's. His *The importance of Being Earnest* shows a light, comic artifice in the very spirit of Congreve. Oliver Goldsmith (1728: 74) is often cited along with Sheridan: they broke the spell with their witty and original comedies so that they hold the stage in competition with comedy. Goldsmith's *The GoodNatured Man* (1768) and *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773), particularly the latter, are great examples of comedy of amateur genius in the language.

Modern drama is often more sympathetic to comedy. In the Absurd theatre where modernism and existentialism is expressed, for instance, comedy has been used to express the ironic techniques and thus employ comic conventions and even farce to convey a profoundly serious view

of human existence. As in Shaw's and James M. Barrie's (1860 – 937) we are brought to satiric and sentimental comedy. Shaw's dramatic pieces need to be considered with special care as they do not fit easily into the types, and they cannot be expressed in terms other than themselves. Some call them comedies of ideas; some of manners; some satiric; and yet some shavian. By shavian comedies, it is meant plays which are considered collections of witticisms.

In G. B. Shaw, the attitude towards the suffering of human beings in the modern age takes another direction. It is in the form of a type of drama which Shaw calls pleasant plays and which other critics call Shavian (which is coined from Shaw). G. B. Shaw invites people to go to the theater and he does not ask them to think. He does not have the patience of Henrik Ibsen (who is the father of naturalism in drama particularly in his A Doll's House) who allows the facts to speak for themselves. Shaw strips from the facts everything, which hides them from his intellectual security until they stand out in a form , which is quiet, different from that which has been familiar (Betti, 2013: 38).

Shaw's method is neither to allow the facts to speak for themselves as Henrik Ibsen (1828-906) does, nor to invite the audience to think deeply of what is going on, i. e expressionistic drama; he rather stripes from the facts everything which hides them from the intensity of his intellectual scrutiny, until they, stand out a form quite different from that which made them familiar. This is implemented in all Shaw's comedies, i. e. *Arms and the Man* (1898)., *Candida* (1895), *Pygmalion* (1912), *Man and Superman* (1903), *Heartbreak House* (1971), *Back to Methuselah* (1921), *How He Lied to Her Husband* (1904).

James M. Barrie's comedy is sentimental and whimsical, and in decided contrast to Shaw's satirical comedy. He gives the English theatre a touch 'faery ' and an element of mythology in all his plays, i .e. *The Admirable Crichton* (1902), *Peter Pan* (1904), *The Old Lady Shows Her Medals* (1914), *Dear Brutus* (1971), etc. Barrie in *Peter Pan*, for instance, is concerned with the present and his sentimental fantasy becomes less acceptable when extended to ordinary life. Likewise, he, in *The Old Lady Shows Her Medals*, blends humor and pathos, as he does in most of his plays.

In addition to the previous forms, other forms also appeared in the history of comedy. *Farce* is a kind of comedy intended primarily to provoke laughter, using and exaggerated characters and complicated plots, full of absurd episodes, ludicrous situations and knockabout action. It has no apparent intention other than rumbustious entertainment and the good-natured depiction of folly. Unlike satire it is not censorious. Farcical elements date back to Aristophanes and occur alongside serious drama in all ages; then, it came to be used in the interludes of the English mystery plays. And though elements of farce emerge in the work of all great comic playwrights, a pure farce, unmixed with other comic styles, appears as a common genre only in the nineteenth century and Brandon *Thomas's Charley's Aunt* (1892) is often cited as an example of farce.

Burlesque is a special kind of comic writing; the mockery of a serious matter or style, achieved by dealing with a subject in a deliberately incongruous manner. There are several types of burlesque:

(1) **Parody** is the comic imitation of a particular work or author, often achieved by mimicking an author's style and applying it to a ridiculous subject.

(2) **Travesty** is the mockery of a subject by treating it in an absurdly low style. The play put on by the rude mechanicals within Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595-6) is a well - known example: it burlesques the theatrical Interlude.

Slapstick is a broad, comedy with knockabout action, fighting, clown people falling over each other, and so on.

5. Heroic Drama

This type of drama includes plays written mostly during the restoration period with subjects which aspired to epic grandeur, dealing with the exploits in battles and love, of great warriors, emperors, and kings. Typically, the demands of love and patriotic duty come into conflict. The audience here wanted to be taken out of themselves and to be shown a world which was not limited by the petty restraints of conventional existence. Such dramas are called heroic because the characters were of larger mould and moved in an ampler world than that of ordinary

experience (Whitfield, 1968: 99; and 98). John Dryden's (1631-700) *All for Love* (1677), a reworking of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* (1606-700) is one of the most successful examples of this kind of drama.

6. Masque

Masque is a courtly dramatic entertainment which, flourished in Europe during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century by Ben Jonson in 1609. It is a kind of drama played by masked actors with extravagant costumes and spectacular stage effects and decorations combined in a loose plot, usually allegorical or mythological. The masque became to be more elaborate and serious in subject matter, but it remained poetic and symbolic, never became naturalistic. Jonson established the conventions of the masque and seems to have originated the anti-masque which provided a contrast between the gods, goddesses and courtly personages on the one hand and rural or low characters, comic or grotesque, or grotesque creatures of the imagination, on the other. Shakespeare used masque or masque elements in *Love's Labour's Lost* (1594-5), *Romeo and Juliet* (1595-6), *Much Ado About Nothing, The Merry Wives of Windsor, Henry VIII* (1612-3), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest.*

7. Chronicle plays

This term is used to mean history plays which deal with historical facts. More specifically, chronicle plays are those which draw their material from Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* (1577-87) recounting the history of England. Marlowe's *Edward II* (1592) and Shakespeare's *Richard II* (1595), *Richard III* (1592- 3), *Henry IV* (1596-7) and *Henry V* (1599) are examples of such types of plays. In this regard, Shakespeare's history plays are the principal ones; Shakespeare wrote also the Roman history plays: *Julius Caesar* (1599), *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Croiolanus* (1607-8).

8. The Plays of Sentiment

In the eighteen century, middle-class people began to be interested neither in Restoration comedies nor in heroic dramas, but in another type drama: A drama of sentiment. Such respectable drama contains characters the audience can be in sympathy with and thus be spending much of their time altering lofty sentiments. In such plays, there were no villains, and the success of the dramatist depended largely on his ability to bring his characters into situations in which their tender feelings should be so distressed that the audience might weep in sympathy with them. These plays included both tragedies and comedies. And most of the tragedies no longer had kings and princes for their heroes but every day characters- the audience were familiar with in their ordinary lives. An example of those sentimental playwrights is George Lillo (1693-739) who provoked sentimental tears and stood solidly for middle –class morality in plays like *The London Merchant* (1731) and *The Gamester* (1737).

9. Melodrama

Melodrama flourished in the second half of the eighteenth century after the decline of sentimental plays and the partial replacement of Goldsmith and Sheridan's vigorous comedies. This type of drama has more than little in common with the sentimental plays, but had altered so that less talk and much more action is permitted. Such drama portrayed villains who were torn by the pangs of remorse without enjoying the blessings of repentance. By definition and originally, it meant a play with music as a background to the dialogue, including early opera, but in the nineteenth century popular theatres in London put on plays with musical accompaniment. These plays were naively sensational with simple, flat characterization, unrelentingly vicious villains, and much bloodthirsty action, including horrible murders, ghosts and the like. The most well-known examples are T. W. Roberston's (1829-71) *Caste* (1867), and *Maria Marten*; or *The Murder in the Red Barn* (1830). Roberston marked the end of the old type of drama and thus was natural in dialogue and situations and closer to real life.

10. Naturalistic Drama

Naturalism is a more particularized branch of realism. Thus, naturalistic drama depicts life as it is; exposing the social ills and problems on the stage though sometimes they are radical and shocking and thus, using language of daily existence. This is hardly possible: no play, no matter how natural it may appear on the stage, does in fact present life as it really is. What happens is that the playwright is highly skilful to create an illusion that what is going on in this play might as well happen in real life; this is manipulated by making his characters do and say nothing which is in obvious contrast to common experience. It is the Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen, who first showed what powerful effects can be produced when a play creates an illusion in the audience that they are watching on episode of life. Ibsen's drama was serious in content, simple and conversation in style and realistic in portraying ordinary people and the problems they face in life. His plays invalidated the old beliefs and proposed new ones.

For him, the evil he fights is 'idealism' and the enemy he encounters is the 'idealist' who makes realities and fancies. In sum, Ibsen's contribution lies in his realism of action, character and dialogue; the use of prose as opposed to verse; the treatment of social problems and ideas; the portrayal of the common place; and the revolution of woman. All such elements can be seen in all Ibsen's plays: *A Doll's House, Ghosts, The Fretenders, An Enemy of the people, Brand, Peer Gynt,* and *when We Dead Awaken.*

All the great features of modern plays descend from Ibsen. These features include the realism , the social significance , the psychological elements , the naturalness , the complex characterization and some others. His great contribution lies in their conceiving of drama as a representation of life. His recognition that life cannot be broken down into numerous separate compartments : ideas , emotions , and actions. He saw life as in integration of all these elements :action as motivated by character , ideas as motivating character , etc. In Ibsen , there is a realism of action , character and dialogue , and a treatment of the social problems and ideas. He uses prose not verse and portrays the commonplace and the lives of the middle class. He believes the more successful the playwright is , the more skilful he can create inside the spectators a kind of illusion that what they see represent life. All these

features of Ibsen's works were brought attention to by a new critic who then became a playwright himself , Shaw. These features were then introduced into Shaw's works (BEtti, 2013: 37).

A Short Biography of G. B. Shaw

Shaw's life was highly muIti-lateral in the sense of being

Following Ibsen's style of naturalistic drama, a number of other dramatists in the modern age wrote their plays: August Strindberge, John Millington Synge, John Galsworthy (1867-933) and Eugene O'Neill (1888-953).

Strindberg's, the Swedish playwright, reputation rests on presenting naturalistic views in *The Father* (1987) and *Miss Julie* (1888); and expressionistic ideas in *The Road to Damascus* (1898901) and *A Dream play* (1901). In *The Stronger*, Strindberg presented a quart d'heure about the struggle between the sexes. What is important about the life of the Irish playwright, Strindberge, as related to The Stronger is that he married three times but none of his marriages was a success. That is why, marriage is the prevailing theme of the play (Betti, 2013: 34). In this play, the playwright quotes something of his personal life. He appears to be making a social autobiography. He inserts two characters struggling for the sake of a man. This man is the playwright himself whose three marriages were not successful. In spite of that, the character of the man does not appear which adds to the suspense created in the play (Betti, ibid).

Synge, the Irish playwright, wrote a number of plays: *The shadow of the Glen* (1903), *Riders to the Sea, The Well of the Saints* (1905) and his comedy *The playboy of the Western World* (1907). His plays are full of realism, mysticism, emotion and highly poetic prose. Galsworthy wrote seven plays mostly tragic and realistic: *The Silver Box* and *The man of property (*1906), *Escape* (1908), *The Skin Game* (1920), *Localities (1922), Strife (1909) and Justice* (1910). In all his plays, he selected social problems rather blatantly and put them in simple characterization.

O'Neill, the American playwright, was influenced by Ibsen and Strindberg . O'Neill's plays show naturalistic and expressionistic views: *Beyond the Horizon* (1920), *The Emperor Jones* (1921), *Anna Christie and The Hairy Ape* (1922), *Desire Under the Elms* (1923), *Strange Interlude* (1928) and *The Iceman Cometh* (1946).

11. One-Act plays

The one-act play is a form of drama, which emerged in the modern era as the modern society was influenced by industrialization, two world wars, a decline of values, etc. Its roots can he traced back to the medieval morality plays and Japanese Noah plays. Such plays are restricted by time and diction. As such, playwrights do their best to make their characters and situations easily understood and appreciated by their audience. Thus, their dialogue must be subtle and language must be concise, trest and condensed. Unnecessary details, ambiguous incidents, bombastic speeches, length digressions, superfluous statements and complicated plots do not usually exist in this kind of drama.

Though the one-act play is limited by certain restrictions, it has its own freedom and flexibility. All the types of the full- length drama - ranging from melodrama to mime and farce have been successfully attempted. It also lent itself to all the passing dramatic trends and fashions, such as realistic, naturalistic, romantic, epic, imagist, symbolic, expressionistic, futurist, absurd, etc. Playwrights like Strindberg, Synge, Galsworthy and O'Neill wrote naturalistic one-act plays, i. e. *How He Lied to Her Husband*; Eliot poetic drama, *Sweeney Agonistes* (1932); , Cangiullo Futurist *There Is No Dog*;
Brecht epic one-act plays, *The Seven Deadly Sins of the and Lower Middle Class* (1933); Beckett's mime, *Act Without Words*; and Pinter absurd drama, *The Room*; etc.

12. Modernist Drama

The First World War (1914-8) is generally considered to be the catalyst that initiated the modern period in literature. Modernism is the label that distinguishes some characteristics of twentieth -century writing, in so far as it differs from the conventions inherited from the nineteenth century. Radical technical innovations have taken place in all of the three major genres. Further than this, there are several modernisms ranging from symbolism, post-impressionism, expressionism futurism, imagism, vorticism, dadaism and surrealism. The modernist theatre had celebrated breaking the old forms and conventions, and reflecting its reality and presenting its trust through abstractions of reality. Such

modernistic attitudes can be easily seen in Cangiullo's futurist and imagist drama, i. e. *There Is No Dog*; Brecht's epic theatre; Eliot's revival of religious and verse drama; the theatre of cruelty; Beckett's absurd drama,; and the angry theatre.

13. Futurist Drama

Futurists advocated the destruction and rejection of all grammatical and artistic conventions and rules in their search for new media, and perfect freedom for their unconscious creative minds without the rheumatism of logic'. They espoused speed, war and fascism: though apparently revolutionary, the consequences of their views were highly reactionary and isolationist. The main advocate was the Italian poet and publicist Emilio Fillippo Marinetti who contributed to the futurist manifesto in 1909. In the theatre, Francisco Cangiullo is one of the Italian dramatists who established this movement during the second decade of this century. A collection of Cangiullo's short plays including *There Is No Dog* was published in 1915. These futurist plays were examples of the play as an image (tableau) carried to an extreme. Such futurist plays, in which there is neither character nor dialogue, embody modern life in which language is not devoted to bringing meaningful communication among interlocutors but misunderstanding,
and give a feature of openendedness which brings different interpretations by the audience. Beckett's *Act without Words*, serves as a fruitful implementation of such views and the like.

14. The Epic Theatre

The epic theatre is an influential style of theatrical presentation and dramatic writing developed in Germany in the 1920. It presents a series of episodes in a simple, direct way, with accompaniment of a narrator, poetic fragment, summaries of the plot, songs, projection of slides onto a screen, music and so on. Brecht, who propagates this type of theatre, tries hard to bring about the alienation effect in the production of his plays: the creation of a sort of detachment between the audience and the characters in order to create a belief in the audience that they are not watching their lives manifested, and thus they, should not be swept away by their emotions. Thus, many of the above techniques are resorted to achieve this end-alienation effect. By virtue of its relevance

and realistic nature, this type of theatre stands in opposition to Aristotle's catharsis whose main concern is the creation of contact between the audience and the characters to bring about purgation of the former's emotions. The modern stage, by its facilities and structure, aids a lot in implementing this theory. This theory is followed in many of Brecht's plays: *The Life of Galileo* (1938); *Mother Courage and Her Children; The Good Woman of Setzuan*
(1943) and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1948). In three of his plays; *The Seven Deadly Sins of the Lower Middle Class, A Man's a Man* (1924-6), and *The Woman of Setzuan*, Brecht employed the technique of monopolylogue, i. e. showing the double personalities of one character.

15. Verse Drama

English drama has been greatly affected by Greek drama and thus many Greek dramatic elements appeared in the English theatre starting from *Gorboduc* by Sackville and Norton. In addition, the beginning of Greek drama as well as English is religious i. e. morality, mystery and miracle plays, dealing with certain extracts of the Bible for secularization. Likewise , the medium of expression for a number of dramatists, before and after Shakespeare, is poetical as poetry was the normal medium of drama . Shakespeare, for instance, "was all along holding out to him the most 'unattainable' ideal of poetic drama- a rare synthesis of and of musical order.

What is evident is that modern playwrights had long abandoned religious plays and the inclusion of Greek elements of drama and of certain dramatic conventions. As believed by T. S. Eliot: The theatre has reached a point at which a revolution in principles should take place although that necessary convention might be in technique, in subject matter, in form, the surest convention was to be found in the liturgy. Drama springs from religious liturgy, and it cannot afford to depart too far from it. It is clear that Eliot emphasized liturgy as a sort of store for conventions and which can supply English drama with conventions to rescue present state. Thus, verse is a necessary element in the recovery of drama. That is why, he wrote in 1935 a play about the martyrdom of Thomas a Becket, i. e. *Murder in the Cathedral*. This play was followed by a rash of religious plays, written for performance in churches and

cathedrals. The wheel had come full circle: the English drama had returned to its place of origin, the Christian church. A revival of poetic drama thus occurred.

In *Murder in the Cathedral*, Eliot combined a medieval subject with the style of ancient Greek drama, having a chorus on the significance of the action. Part of the success of this play was due to the re-discovery of the effectiveness of dramatic conventions. The contribution of a chorus and the cadences of choral verse-speaking came as a revelation of delight to audiences to whom they were unfamiliar. None of Eliot's subsequent plays in verse has had quite the success of this first.

In addition to Eliot, W. H. Auden (b. 1907), Christopher-Isherwood (b. 1904), Christopher Fry (b. 1907), Lawrence, Dorothy Sayer and James Schevill re-established verse drama in the contemporary theatre. Auden and Isherwood used the stage for leftwing propaganda in *The Dance of Death* and *The Dog Beneath the Skin*, plays which employed verse of a racy, colloquial kind, songs in popular idiom, and various expressionist devices. Similarly in *The Ascent of F6* (1936) and *On the Frontier*, they confirmed the ideas and the political agility of Auden's non-dramatic verse, but they made no major impact. Fry's *The Boy With a Cart* (1939), *A Phoenix Too Frequent* (1946), *The Lady's Not For Burning* (1949), *Venus Observed* (1950) and *A Sleep of Prisoners* (1951) made him to be compared with Elizabethan playwrights for brilliance of imagery and felicity of language. In addition, Lawrence's *David*, Sayers's *The Zeal of Thy House* and *Schevill's The Bloody Tenent* are all religious dramas written as one-act plays.

16. Theatre of Cruelty

The theatre of cruelty is a type of theatre in which vivid effects, mime, and sensational, even horrific action and spectacle predominate. This theatre, was initiated by the French playwright Antonin Artand who arguedin 1938 that plays should shock the audience in order to release subconscious truths. The German playwright Peter Weiss's *Marat/Sade* (1964) is a famous example.

17. Absurd Drama

Absurd drama is a mass of inchocate materials which bide Farwell to the conventional techniques and elements of traditional theatre. This type of drama is absurd in this sense-it has none of the age-old values or qualities of a well-made play. It has no plot to speak of, no plausible motivation, no well-sketched character, etc. This type is absurd also because it expresses the philosophy of the absurd which is related to the philosophy of existentialism which tends to depict man as isolated in a purposeless and incomprehensible universe of space and time.

Absurd drama was derived from the French philosopher and novelist Albert Camus in the collection of essays called *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942). This term was popularized by Martin Esslin's book *The Theatre of the Absurd* (1961). Camus defined the absurd as the tension which emerges from man's determination to discover purpose and order in a world which steadfastly refuses to evidence either. To Esslin, the term is applied to dramatists as diverse as Beckett, Ionesco, Adamov , Genet, Arrabal and Simpson .

The treatment of language in absurd drama is of special nature and reveals some intrinsic qualities of this type. In conventional drama, language occupies a central position and is never at cross purpose to the action. Meanwhile, the absurd dramatists refuse to recognize the centrality of language which is in practice used only as one of the components. In fact, language is devalued by these writers perhaps because they feel that language hides more things than it reveals. Language, to absurd dramatists, perhaps, is not enough for communication; sometimes, it brings misunderstanding.

This type of drama is closely associated with such names as Beckett, in such works as *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame* (1957), *Act Without Words, krapp's Last Tape* (1958) and *Not I (1973);* Eugene Ionesco (b. 1912) in *The Chairs* (1952), *Maid to Mary* (1953), and *Amedeeand The killer (I959); Pinter in The Room, The Birthday Party (1958); The Caretaker* (1960), . *The Party and The Homecoming* (1965), *No Man's Land* (1975), etc.

18. The Theatre of Anger

The Theatre of Anger for certain British playwrights and public figures, appeared in the 1950. John Osborne's (b. 1929) *Look Back in Anger* is the most famous and enduring work of this movement. This type of theatre is that of the Proletariate. "Jimmy Porter", the hero, indulges his anguished consciousness in long tirades against the mid class mentality of his wife and her family: "porter" is the quintessential 'Anger' .

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST

BY

OSCAR WILDE

Summary and Analysis

Act I: Part 1

Summary

The curtain opens on the flat of wealthy Algernon Moncrieff in London's fashionable West End. While Algernon (Algy, for short) plays the piano, his servant (Lane) is arranging cucumber sandwiches for the impending arrival of Algernon's aunt (Lady Bracknell) and her daughter (Gwendolen). Mr. Jack Worthing (a friend of Moncrieff's and known to him as Ernest) arrives first. Jack announces that he plans to propose marriage to Gwendolen, but Algernon claims that he will not consent to their marriage until Jack explains why he is known as Ernest and why he has a cigarette case with a questionable inscription from a mysterious lady.

Jack claims that he has made up the character of Ernest because it gives him an excuse to visit the city. In the country, however, he is known as Jack Worthing, squire, with a troubled brother named Ernest. At first he lies and says the cigarette case is from his Aunt Cecily. Algernon calls his bluff, and Jack confesses that he was adopted by Mr. Thomas Cardew when he was a baby and that he is a guardian to Cardew's granddaughter, Cecily, who lives on his country estate with her governess. Miss Prism.

Similarly, Algernon confesses that he has invented an imaginary invalid friend, named Bunbury, whom he visits in the country when he feels the need to leave the city. After speculating on marriage and the need to have an excuse to get away, the two agree to dine together at the fashionable Willis', and Jack enlists Algernon's assistance in distracting Lady Bracknell so that Jack can propose to Gwendolen.

Analysis

Wilde sets the tone for hilarious mischief in this first scene. The many layers of meaning work together to entertain and to provoke thought. He makes fun of all the Victorians hold sacred, but in a light-hearted, amusing wordfest. His humor has multiple layers of meaning: social criticism of the upper and middle Victorian class values, references to the homosexual community and its culture,

use of locales and landmarks familiar to his upper-class audience, and epigrams —short, witty sayings—and puns that not only provide humor but also reinforce his social critique.

First, Wilde must introduce his characters and setting. Both Jack and Algernon are living their lives through masks; deliberately, their double lives parallel Wilde's living as a married man with a clandestine homosexual life. Both characters are also recognizable to the upper- and middle-class audiences as stock figures.

Algernon is a stylish dandy—a young man very concerned about his clothes and appearance—in the pose of the leisure-class man about town. His fashionable apartment in a stylish locale immediately tells the audience that they are watching a comedy about the upper class. After introducing Algernon, Wilde turns him into a comic figure of self-gratification, stuffing his mouth with cucumber sandwiches. Self-gratification is ammunition against the repressive Victorian values of duty and virtue. In fact, as Algernon and Jack discuss marriage and Gwendolen, food becomes a symbol for lust, a topic not discussed in polite society. Much of what Algernon says is hopeless triviality, beginning a motif that Wilde will follow throughout the play: Society never cares about substance but instead reveres style and triviality. Wilde seems to be saying that in Victorian society people seem unaware of the difference between trivial subjects and the more valuable affairs of life.

Jack is a little more serious than Algernon, perhaps because of his position as a country magistrate and his concern over his unconventional lineage. Helplessly a product of his time and social standing, Jack knows the rules, the appropriate manners, and the virtue of turning a phrase beautifully. He is an accepted upper-class gentleman, mainly because of the Cardew fortune. Novels written during this period, such as those of Charles Dickens, often turned on melodramatic plot devices such as the orphan discovering his real identity and winning his true love. Wilde hilariously turns this popular orphan plot on its head by having Jack found in a handbag in a major railroad station. Absurdity is Wilde's forte.

Both men are living a secret life, Jack with his Ernest identity and Algernon with his friend, Bunbury. Even Lane, Algy's servant, seems to have a second life in which he filches champagne and sandwiches from his "betters." Wilde seems to be saying that in a society where all is respectable but dull, a fictitious identity is necessary to liven things up. The classic nineteenth-century farce often turned on such mix-ups.

The deliberate use of the name Ernest is calculated. Earnestness, or devotion to virtue and duty, was a Victorian ideal. It stood for sincerity, seriousness, and hard work. Duty to one's family and name was a form of earnestness. Wilde

turns these connotations upside down, making Ernest a name used for deception. Some critics suggest that *earnest* (in this context) means a double life. Other critics believe that *earnest* is understood in some circles to mean homosexual. By using the name Ernest throughout the play, and even in the title, Wilde is making references to social criticism, his own life, and his plot devices. He playfully makes a pun using *earnest/Ernest* when Algernon says, "You are the most earnest-looking person I ever saw in my life," following his discussion of Ernest as Jack's name.

Marriage in Victorian England comes under fire throughout the first act. Wilde saw marriages filled with hypocrisy and often used to achieve status. Wilde also saw marriage as an institution that encouraged cheating and snuffed out sexual attraction between spouses. When Lane says that wine is never of superior quality in a married household, Algernon questions Lane's marital status. Lane flippantly mentions that his own marriage resulted from a "misunderstanding." The nonsense continues as Jack explains that his purpose in coming to the city was to propose. Algernon replies that he thought Jack had "come up for pleasure? . . . I call that business." Algernon humorously explains that to be in love is romantic, but a proposal is never romantic because "one may be accepted." Marriage brings about an end to the romantic excitement of flirting: ". . . girls never marry the men they flirt with. Girls don't think it right." Each of these references to marriage or courtship trivializes a serious subject and turns around accepted values. Wilde corrupts the maxim, "Two's company; three's a crowd," to humorously chide the conservative audience. Algernon says, "In married life three is company and two is none." So much for the joys of wedded life. In short, Wilde seems to say that marriage is a business deal containing property, wealth, and status. Family names and bloodlines are deathly important.

Wilde uses food and eating as symbols for the sensual and/or for lust. Victorians did not discuss such subjects in polite society. Mouthing platitudes about the reverence of marriage, duty, and virtue, Victorian males often conducted extra-marital affairs with the blessings of a hypocritical society. Wilde expresses their repressed sexual drives with the hilarious scenes of his characters eating voraciously and discussing food. He also refers to sex and vitality with the euphemism of "health." When Algernon says that Gwendolen is "devoted to bread and butter," Jack immediately grabs some bread and butter and starts eating greedily.

Class warfare is also a subject of this first act. While the servants, such as Lane, wait on the upper classes, they also observe their morals. They might not comment, but their facial expressions betray their understanding of their own

role in life, which involves waiting and doing, but not commenting.

Style and manners also come under attack. In Victorian England, style and correct manners were much more important than substance. Algernon feels his style of piano playing is much more important than his accuracy. Triviality is the witty, admired social repartee of the day, a perfect homage to style over substance. In fact, the characters in this play often say the opposite of what is understood to be true. In this way Wilde shows his audience the hypocrisy of their commonly held beliefs.

Victorian culture is also a target. Algernon's quip, "More than half of modern culture depends on what one shouldn't read," is a reference once again to hypocrisy. Read something scandalous to be in style, but do not speak of it in polite company. Double standards abound. Daily newspapers come under Algernon's attack as the writings of people who have not been educated and who think of themselves as literary critics. Perhaps Wilde is saying that the critical reviews of the day should be in the hands of people who are educated to understand art.

Wilde's upper-class audiences, far from being angered by his attack on Victorian values, were actually mollified by references to locations and cultural names with which they were familiar. British names of real places such as Willis', Grosvenor Square, Tunbridge Wells in Kent, or Half Moon Street, would have been well-known references in their world. Upper-class London audiences recognized these familiar locations and knew the character types that Jack and Algernon represented.

Some critics have suggested that Wilde began his writing projects by accumulating a group of epigrams he wished to explore. (Often, these sayings about life were widely known but not really examined closely.) He turned these hackneyed phrases upside down to suggest that, although they knew the clichés, most British audiences did not stop to think about how meaningless they were. For example, "Divorces are made in heaven" (a corruption of the familiar "Marriages are made in heaven") suggests that divorce contributes to happiness —perhaps a greater truism than the familiar phrase given the tenor of Victorian society. Wilde makes fun of peoples' trivial concerns over social status when he says, "Nothing annoys people so much as not receiving invitations."

Wilde's use of language as a tool for humor continues with his hilarious puns. A *pun* is a wordplay that often involves differing understandings of what a word means and how it is used in a given context. In speaking of dentists and their *impressions*, Jack says, "It is very vulgar to talk like a dentist when one isn't a dentist. It produces a false impression." Algernon counters, "Well, that is exactly what dentists always do." False teeth, dental impressions to mold them, and

social impressions are all wrapped up in this pun. In a society where turning a phrase and witty repartee were considered much-admired skills, Wilde was at his best.

Glossary

Half Moon Street a very fashionable street in London's West End; its location is handy to gentlemen's clubs, restaurants, and theatres.

"slight refreshment at five o'clock" known as light tea, served to people who visit at this time of day.

"Shropshire is your county" a reference to Jack Worthing's position as county magistrate.

Divorce Court Before 1857, divorces could only be granted by Parliament at great expense, and they rarely happened. In 1857, Divorce Court was passed by Parliament, making divorce easier.

Tunbridge Wells a fashionable resort in Kent.

The Albany Ernest Worthing's address on his calling cards was actually the home of George Ives, a friend of Wilde's and an activist for homosexual rights.

Bunbury the name of a school friend of Wilde's. Here, someone who deceives.

sent down to act as a lady's escort for dinner.

corrupt French Drama possibly a reference to the plays of Alexander Dumas in the 1850s.

Act I: Part 2

Summary

Lady Bracknell and her daughter, Gwendolen, arrive. She is expecting her nephew, Algernon, at a dinner party that evening, but Algy explains that he must go see his invalid friend, Bunbury, in the country. However, he promises to make arrangements for the music at her reception on Saturday. They exchange small talk about various members of the upper class, and Lady Bracknell exclaims at the lack of cucumber sandwiches. The butler, Lane, lies beautifully, explaining there were no cucumbers in the market.

In an effort to leave Jack alone with Gwendolen, Algernon takes Lady Bracknell into another room to discuss music. Meanwhile, Jack proposes to Gwendolen; unfortunately, she explains that her ideal is to marry someone named Ernest and that Jack has no music or vibration to it. Nevertheless, she accepts his proposal, and Jack decides to arrange a private christening so that he can become Ernest. Lady Bracknell returns and, seeing Jack on bended knee, demands an explanation. Denying the engagement, she sends Gwendolen to the carriage.

Lady Bracknell interrogates Jack to determine his suitability. When Jack explains that he was found in a handbag abandoned in a railway station, Lady Bracknell is shocked. Jack goes on to explain that Mr. Thomas Cardew found him in Victoria Station and named him "Worthing" for the destination of his train ticket. Lady Bracknell announces that Gwendolen cannot "marry into a cloakroom, and form an alliance with a parcel." She advises Jack to find some relations. She bids him good morning and majestically sweeps out as Algernon plays the wedding march from the next room. Turning his thoughts to Cecily, Jack decides to kill off his "brother" Ernest with a severe chill in Paris because Cecily Cardew, his ward, is far too interested in the wicked Ernest, and as her guardian, Jack feels it his duty to protect her from inappropriate marriage suitors.

Gwendolen returns and tells Jack they can never marry, but she will always love him, and she will try to change her mother's mind. She asks for his country address so that she can write him daily and, as he dictates the address, Algernon furtively writes it on his own shirt cuff because he is curious about Cecily Cardew.

Analysis

The action and satire in Act I is heightened with the arrival of Lady Bracknell. She is an aristocratic Victorian and Algernon's aunt. Arrogant, opinionated, and conservative, Lady Bracknell is the epitome of the Victorian upper-class dowager. Wilde uses Lady Bracknell to continue his satire of Victorian attitudes about marriage. Marriage is a process of careful selection and planning by parents. Social status, lineage, and wealth combine to make marriage a business proposition that unites power. Lady Bracknell will tell Gwendolen when and to whom she will be engaged, and Gwendolen has nothing to say about it. In fact, love is not a factor in marriage nor is the opinion of the children. Lady Bracknell cross-examines Jack, commenting on his wealth and politics. When she hears Jack has "lost" his parents, she exclaims at his "carelessness." Discovering he is the accident of an unknown line of ancestors, she suggests he produce at least one parent—no matter how he does it—to strengthen his marriage prospects. Absurdly, Jack says he can produce the handbag, and it should satisfy her need for a parent. As for other examples of Wilde's opinions on marriage, Lady Bracknell mentions a recently widowed Lady Harbury who looks twenty years younger since her husband died, and now she lives for pleasure instead of duty. Wilde is mocking Victorian attitudes toward marriage and asking why bloodlines and wealth should be more important than love. Once again marriage is a duty, not a pleasure.

As for education, the proper Victorian believed schooling should continue the status quo, and "fortunately in England, at any rate, education produces no effect whatsoever. If it did, it would prove a serious danger to the upper classes, and probably lead to acts of violence in Grosvenor Square." A proper education is later echoed in the readings Miss Prism gives to Cecily Cardew, Jack's ward. Any revolution or change in thinking at any time is anathema to Lady Bracknell and the conservative upper class. Politics should be in the hands of the "right people." To the Victorian upper class, proper behavior, such as knowing who your parents are, keeps the standards where they should be. They feared that contempt for those things could lead to "the worst excesses of the French Revolution. And I presume you know what that unfortunate movement led to?" French aristocrats were executed, and Lady Bracknell would prefer to keep her head. Through the farcical Lady Bracknell, Wilde is once again criticizing a society where the upper class is determined to keep attitudes and power in the hands of the few; the radical idea that people should be taught to actually think and question is scary to those in power.

Wilde appears to be commenting on the traditional Victorian concept of family, also, where the restrictive bonds of duty smother initiative, imagination, and freedom. In Jack's case, Lady Bracknell feels family can be acquired, much like a luxurious home or expensive carriage. When Jack is critical of Lady Bracknell, instead of coming to his aunt's defense, Algernon says, "Relations are simply a tedious pack of people who haven't got the remotest knowledge of how to live, nor the smallest instinct about when to die." Both Jack and Algernon can escape to the country and change into different identities, escaping the duties of family. Jack would like to know his true identity, and Gwendolen would like to break away from her mother's conservative opinions. Wilde seems to foresee the phrase, *dysfunctional families.*

Gwendolen's middle name could be "absurdity." She trivializes serious ideas and imagines people and events that have never existed. Strangely, she chooses a husband based on his name. Wilde is asking if marrying for a person's name is any more intelligent, or absurd, than marrying based on wealth and parents. Wilde presents Gwendolen as a character who accepts the social order simply because it is defined from pulpits and popular magazines. Once again, Wilde is being critical of people who mouth the public sentiments and do not think for themselves. Gwendolen is also constantly saying words that are the opposite of what is known to be true, illustrating Wilde's idea that upper-class conversation is trivial and meaningless. She tells Jack, "the simplicity of your character makes you exquisitely incomprehensible to me." Instead of the young respecting their elders, Gwendolen laments, "Few parents nowadays pay any regard to what their children say to them. The old-fashioned respect for the young is fast dying out."

Jack's proposal itself is ludicrous. Gwendolen is only concerned that the form is correct. In fact, she fully intends to say yes only if his name is Ernest. When Jack mentions the word marriage, she protests that he has not even discussed it with her yet, and he must do so in the correct style. She asserts that her brother even practices proposing to get the form correct. Wilde is taking a subject—love and marriage—that should be filled with passion and depth and turning it into an exercise in form. This scene is a parody of love and romance, capturing the emptiness of Victorian values that rely on style, not substance.

Throughout Act I, Wilde's characters worship the trivial at the expense of the profound. He seems to be saying that the audience should take a long look at what their society deems valuable. Society is described in multiple contexts as clever people talking nonsense and triviality. In a dialogue between Jack and Algernon, Jack says, "I am sick to death of cleverness. Everybody is clever nowadays. You can't go anywhere without meeting clever people. The thing has become an absolute public nuisance. I wish to goodness we had a few fools left."

When Algernon says, "We have," Jack wonders what they talk about. Algernon replies, "about the clever people, of course." Wilde continues satirizing the Victorian love of the trivial when he ends the act with Jack and Algernon observing that nobody ever talks anything but nonsense. Each of these conversations reprimands British society's concern for the superficial at the expense of deeper values.

What subjects should a society take seriously? Wilde obviously thought society should revere sympathy and compassion for others. But Lady Bracknell treats the very human concerns of death and illness with irreverence and flippancy. She tells Algernon, "It is high time that Mr. Bunbury made up his mind whether he was going to live or to die. This shilly-shallying with the question is absurd." Furthermore, she does not think a person's illnesses should be encouraged. Rather than being sympathetic, she hopes Mr. Bunbury will not have a relapse on Saturday, thus throwing a wrench in her party plans. Again, by having the farcical Lady Bracknell express these thoughts, Wilde conveys his desire for his audience to question their tendency to value social calendars at the expense of sympathy for others.

The subject of Cecily introduces a new kind of woman to the play. When Algy expresses some interest in Jack's ward. Jack explains that she is not at all like the usual young woman in society. "She has got a capital appetite, goes on long walks, and pays no attention at all to her lessons." Unlike most young Victorian women, Cecily is independent, strong, and can figure out what she wants. Her description intrigues Algy, and plans start simmering in his head.

Besides using the character of Algernon to comment on the values of Victorian society, Wilde also uses him to illuminate the lifestyle of the young dandy or aesthete. When Jack and Algernon discuss their evening plans, it is described as hard work: "Shall we go out for dinner? Go to the theatre? Go to the club? Go to the Empire?" When Algy asks what they should do, Jack says, "Nothing!" Algernon retorts, "It is awfully hard work doing nothing." To take little seriously, to not work, and to artfully cultivate the air of doing nothing were all poses of the aesthetes. Algernon also tears up bills that arrive, illustrating the casual attitude of dandies toward responsibilities.

As the play progresses, Wilde continues his epigrams and puns. One of his most memorable refers to the nature of men and women. Algernon explains, "All women become like their mothers. That is their tragedy. No man does. That's his." Perhaps Wilde feels that while women might not wish to become their mothers, men would be wise to cultivate some of the attitudes and values of females; perhaps this is a nod to homosexuality. Throughout the act, epigrams deliver Wilde's social commentary on families, men and women, marriage,

status, and the values of the upper class. A common lament of the titled gentry is also satirically mentioned by Lady Bracknell when discussing Jack's wealth: "What between the duties expected of one during one's lifetime, and the duties exacted from one after one's death, land has ceased to be either a profit or a pleasure. It gives one position, and prevents one from keeping it up." The use of the word *duties* is a delicious pun also. It means both the duties a person is expected to do according to his position and taxes placed on estates by the government.

Glossary

Grosvenor Square a very affluent area of London in the Mayfair district.

Belgrave Square another affluent London area in Belgravia.

Liberal Unionist a political group that voted against Home Rule for Ireland in 1886. Liberals were the conservative political group.

Tories members of the more conservative political circles. Lady Bracknell and other wealthy socialites would approve.

"only eighteen" Cecily is the precise age to "come out" as a Society debutante. During the Season, 18-year-olds were introduced as marriage material for suitable men.

The Empire a theatre in Leicester Square, London.

The Railway Guide an indispensable timetable of railway departures and arrivals, probably invented by Robert Diggles Kay in either 1838 or 1839.

Act II: Part 1

Summary

Act II is set at Jack Worthing's country estate where Miss Prism is seated in the garden giving her student, Cecily Cardew, a lesson in German grammar. When Cecily expresses an interest in meeting Jack's wicked brother, Ernest, Miss Prism repeats Jack's opinion that his brother has a weak character. The governess knows what happens to people who have weak characters. In her younger days, Miss Prism wrote a three-volume novel, and she proclaims that fiction shows how good people end happily and bad people end unhappily.

The local reverend, Canon Chasuble, enters and flirts with Miss Prism. The two leave for a turn in the garden. While they are gone, Merriman, the butler, announces Mr. Ernest Worthing has just arrived with his luggage and is anxious to speak with Miss Cardew. Algernon comes in, pretending to be Jack's brother, Ernest. When Cecily says that Jack is coming to the country Monday afternoon, Algernon/Ernest announces that he will be leaving Monday morning. They will just miss each other. Algernon compliments her beauty, and they go inside just before Miss Prism and Dr. Chasuble return.

Jack enters in mourning clothes because his brother Ernest is dead in Paris. Jack takes the opportunity to ask Dr. Chasuble to re-christen him that afternoon around 5 p.m. Cecily comes from the house and announces that Jack's brother Ernest is in the dining room. Oops. Ernest is supposed to be dead. Algernon comes out, and Jack is shocked. Algernon/Ernest vows to reform and lead a better life.

Jack is angry that Algernon could play such a trick. He orders the dogcart for Algernon to leave in. After Jack goes into the house, Algernon announces he is in love with Cecily. Algernon proclaims his undying affection while Cecily copies his words in her diary. Algernon asks Cecily to marry him, and she agrees. In fact, she agrees readily because she has made up an entire romantic story of their courtship and engagement. She has even written imaginary letters to herself from Ernest/Algernon. She tells Algernon that her dream has always been to marry someone named Ernest because the name inspires such confidence. So, like Jack, Algernon decides he must be re-christened Ernest.

Analysis

Act II expands on many of the motifs introduced in Act I, but adds new characters and targets for Wilde's satire. The setting changes to the country—a bucolic setting for getting away from the artificial trappings of society and entering the simplicity of nature—and Wilde examines religion as well as courtship and marriage in the context of Victorian attitudes. But even in the countryside, the characters cannot escape Victorian manners and correctness, as the name Ernest presents humorous complications.

Idleness, duty, and marriage are brought together in the conversations of several characters. Sighing bitterly, Miss Prism observes that people who live for pleasure are usually unmarried. Duty, duty, duty. Servant of the upper class, Prism sees responsibility tinted with obligation as the correct form in Victorian society. Cecily, however, exclaims to Miss Prism, "I suppose that is why he [Jack] often looks a little bored when we three are together." In subtitling his play *A Trivial Comedy for Serious People*, perhaps Wilde is showing that setting one's jaw in a strong position for living rigidly with duty is both shortsighted and tediously boring.

Miss Prism and Canon Chasuble also provide a comic touch to the subject of religious zeal and its relationship to Victorian morals. Religion is presented as dry, meaningless, and expensive. The minister explains to Jack that the sermons for all sacraments are interchangeable. They can be adapted to be joyful or distressing, depending on the occasion. Through these thoughts Wilde expresses the meaninglessness of religion and the obviously hackneyed, empty words of sermons. Jack's request for a christening is humorous when one considers that he is a grown man—christening is a rite usually appropriate for small babies.

Wilde humorously captures the absurdity of rigid Victorian values when he utilizes Miss Prism as his mouthpiece, a morally upright woman who has, nevertheless, written a melodramatic, romantic novel. Obviously, hypocrisy lurks beneath the strict, puritanical surface of the prim governess. The height of her absurdity over rigid morals comes when she hears that Ernest is dead in Paris after a life of "shameful debts and extravagance." As if to follow through on her duty to raise Cecily with rigid values, she says, "What a lesson for him! I trust he will profit by it."

The Victorian mania to exclude anyone and everyone who did not conform to social norms is touched on by Wilde's satire of reform movements. His words come from Miss Prism when she says, "I am not in favour of this modern mania for turning bad people into good people at a moment's notice." Wilde is reforming here to the duty of the upper class to provide moral role models and

referring here to the duty of the upper class to provide moral role models and convert those who are wicked to the "good" way of life. An endless number of societies existed for the reform of various causes. Algy gleefully utilizes the ruse of helplessness when he begs Cecily to reform him. However, she explains, "I'm afraid I've no time, this afternoon." Reform must have occurred quickly in 1890s England. One of the clearest expressions of Wilde satirizing his upper-class audience members is in the words of the minister. Chasuble is discussing his sermons and mentions that he gave a charity sermon on behalf of the Society for the Prevention of Discontent Among the Upper Orders. This name is a parody of the long names of various societies that the wealthy dallied with in their quest for redemption.

The hidden and repressed sexual nature of Victorian society is emphasized in Act II. Cecily is fascinated by sin and wickedness—but from afar. She hopes Ernest looks like a "wicked person," although she is not sure what one looks like. She is particularly interested in the fact that the prim and proper Miss Prism has written a three-volume novel. Such novels were not deemed proper literature by Victorians, but were read in secret. Of course, the moral of the novel shows clearly that good people win, and bad people are punished. In fact, Miss Prism describes the conservative literary view of the day when she defines fiction as "the good ended happily, and the bad unhappily." As always, these rewards or punishments occur in a clear-cut manner and without exception—in novels.

Much worldlier than Cecily, the canon and Miss Prism flirt outrageously and make innuendoes about desire and lust. Where a headache is usually used as an excuse for a lack of sexual interest, Miss Prism uses it as a reason to go on a walk alone with the minister. The humorous cleric speaks in metaphors and often has to define what he means so that he will not be misunderstood. For example, he states, "Were I fortunate enough to be Miss Prism's pupil, I would hang upon her lips." His words elicit a glare from the prim Miss Prism. He continues to put his foot in his mouth by saying, "I spoke metaphorically. My metaphor was drawn from bees. Ahem!" Such an obvious allusion to the birds and the bees thinly veils a passionate inner life that must not be discussed. Miss Prism answers in kind, calling him "dear Doctor," which seems to be a flirtatious title. There is more than meets the eye here, and Wilde is clearly pointing out the sexual repression of his society and satirizing the societal concern for correct and proper appearances, regardless of what simmers under the surface.

The coded conversation between Miss Prism and Chasuble eventually turns to the discussion of the canon's celibacy, which becomes a joke throughout the act. When he defends the church's stand on celibacy, Miss Prism explains that remaining single is actually more of a temptation to women. To a Victorian

audience, *maturity, ripeness,* and *green* are all coded words dealing with experience and naiveté. Suddenly, the canon realizes he has been saying things that might be interpreted as improper; he hastily covers up with "I spoke horticulturally. My metaphor was drawn from fruits." All his veiled remarks reflect the cryptic nature of sexual experiences in the world of the 1890s. It is a world where adults do not discuss sex directly with their children or in polite society. No wonder Cecily is so fascinated by the subject of wickedness. In her society, young girls are protected from any knowledge of sex, and adults speak of it in obscure terms so as not to let out the big secret.

Class boundaries are also represented by the minister and Miss Prism. As the local canon, Chasuble is at Jack's beck and call and takes his orders from Jack and the local magistrate. If anyone needs a particular ceremony or sermon, the minister is ready to assist. While he is a scholarly man, Chasuble is still at the bottom of the social ladder in the countryside. Miss Prism must earn her living as a governess, and she too is a servant of the wealthy.

Cecily's schooling is a perfect opportunity for Wilde to comment on the grim, unimaginative education of England. Cecily is overprotected lest her imagination run wild. Plain, guttural German is lauded, and Cecily feels plain after reciting it. "The Fall of the Rupee" is seen as "too sensational" for her to read. Political economy was a fast growing academic subject at the time—the province of male students, not young women. Grim, conservative, and unimaginative books are seen as the best way to educate the young. With this foundation, they learn not to question and not to change dramatically the society in which they live. Promoting the status quo is the goal of such learning—an idea that was an anathema to Wilde, hence his desire to satirize it.

Merriman's humor is a foil—or opposite—for Jack's seriousness. Even his name indicates his hidden humor. During the argument about Algernon taking a dogcart back to London, Merriman good-humoredly goes along with Cecily and Jack in the tugging to and fro of Algernon. While he does not express approval or disapproval, he accommodates his upper-class employers and carefully rehearses his facial expressions to show nothing, but through this deliberate rehearsal, Wilde is showing what an artificial, rehearsed society the upper class inhabits. Merriman's job is to orchestrate comings and goings and keep the house running smoothly; he's a proper English servant who knows his place. Similarly, Miss Prism chastises Cecily for watering flowers—a servant's job. By presenting these vignettes—subtle, carefully constructed literary sketches—within the context of a farce, Wilde pokes fun at the Victorian concept that everyone has his duty, and each knows his place.

In Act II, Wilde also exposes the vacuity of the Victorian obsession with

appearance. Algernon declares to Cecily that he would never let Jack pick his clothing because, "He has no taste in neckties at all." Clothing is appearance, and appearance is everything. When Algernon travels to the country for just a few short days, he brings "three portmanteaus, a dressing-case, two hat boxes, and a large luncheon-basket." Once again, trifling subjects command excessive attention.

Cecily keeps a diary of her girlish fancies, and they are much more interesting than reality. Because her education is so dry and boring, she lives an interesting fantasy life, which comprises her own secret and self-directed education. She, like Algernon, seems to be interested in immediate gratification, and she puts him in his place when she first meets him. When he calls her "little cousin Cecily," she counters with, "You are under some strange mistake. I am not little. In fact, I believe I am more than usually tall for my age." Algernon is totally taken aback by her forwardness. Wilde here is hinting at a new and more assertive woman.

Wilde also begins an attack on the concepts of romance and courtship in Act II. Gwendolen and Jack have already demonstrated that proposals must be made correctly, especially if anyone is nearby. Now, Cecily and Algernon present a mockery of conventional courtship and romance. As always, appearance is everything. Cecily's diary is a particularly useful tool to symbolize the deceptive character of romance and courtship. When Miss Prism tells Cecily that memory is all one needs to remember one's life, Cecily replies, "Yes, but it usually chronicles the things that have never happened, and couldn't possibly have happened." False memory is what provides for the romance in Miss Prism's three-volume novel. Young girls' heads are filled with romance and naïve ideas about marriage; the true nature of courtship in Victorian, upper-class society is a business deal, according to Wilde, where financial security and family names are traded for wives. Wilde shows this clearly when Algernon proposes to Cecily and tells her he loves her. He is a bit confused when she explains that they have already been engaged for three months, starting last February 14—at least that is how she recorded her fantasy in her diary. In fact, she even mentions where, when, and how their engagement took place. Furthermore, she has letters written by Ernest that purport his love and chronicle the breaking off of the engagement. (No engagement is serious if it is not broken off at least once and then forgiven.) Comically, she mentions in passing that Ernest has beautiful words but that they are "badly spelled." Through this comment, Wilde highlights the superficial Victorian approach to courtship and marriage by having Cecily criticize the spelling in a love letter. To emphasize this absurdity, Algernon comments on the weather in the same breath as their engagement.

Glossary

"As a man sows, so let him reap." This is a verse from the *Bible*, Galatians 6:7, meaning that actions determine fate.

three-volume novels Lending libraries circulated novels in three parts so that three different readers could be reading at the same time. This practice ended in the late 1800s.

Mudie a lending library.

egeria chastity. Egeri, a nymph, gave wise laws to Numa Pompilius of Rome that were used for the vestal virgins.

Evensong a Sunday evening religious service.

womanthrope a humorous word made up by Miss Prism for a person who hates women.

sententiously full of, or fond of using, maxims, proverbs, and so on, especially in a way that is ponderously trite and moralizing.

the Primitive Church the pre-Reformation Catholic Church, whose priest remained celibate.

canonical practice church law.

Act II: Part 2

Summary

While Algernon rushes out to make christening arrangements, Cecily writes Ernest's proposal in her diary. She is interrupted by Merriman announcing The Honorable Gwendolen Fairfax to see Jack; unfortunately, Jack is at the rectory. Cecily asks her in, and they introduce themselves. Gwendolen did not know Jack had a ward, and she wishes Cecily were older and less beautiful.

Both announce that they are engaged to Ernest Worthing. When they compare diaries, they decide that Gwendolen was asked first; however, Cecily says that since then, he has obviously changed his mind and proposed to Cecily. Merriman and a footman enter with tea, which stops their argument. They discuss geography and flowers in a civilized manner while the servants are present. However, during the tea ceremony, Cecily deliberately gives Gwendolen sugar in her tea when Gwendolen did not want sugar and tea cake when Gwendolen expressly asked for bread and butter. The situation is very tense and strained.

Jack arrives, and Gwendolen calls him Ernest; he kisses Gwendolen, who demands an explanation of the situation. Cecily explains that this is not Ernest but her guardian, Jack Worthing. Algernon comes in, and Cecily calls him Ernest. Gwendolen explains that he is her cousin, Algernon Moncrieff. The ladies then console each other because the men have played a monstrous trick on them. Jack sheepishly admits that he has no brother Ernest and has never had a brother of any kind. Both ladies announce that they are not engaged to anyone and leave to go into the house.

Analysis

Act II explores the personalities of Cecily Cardew and Gwendolen Fairfax. Both women have in common their singled-minded persistence in pursuing a husband named Ernest. They have strong opinions, are able to deal with unexpected situations, and are connected in many instances by dialogue that is repetitive and parallel. However, they also have many differences.

Cecily Cardew is passionate about her desires and her goals, but she is also

Cecily Cardew is passionate about her desires and her goals, but she is also overly protected in the country setting. She is being brought up far away from the temptations and social life of the city, protected until her coming out. Her goal is to marry a solid Victorian husband with the trustworthy name of Ernest. When she meets Algernon, she is sure she has found him.

Gwendolen Fairfax is a big-city, sophisticated woman in sharp contrast to Cecily Cardew. Gwendolen has ideas of her own. Like her mother, Gwendolen is determined. Gwendolen knows what she wants. She comes to the country to pursue her Ernest, thinking she will rescue him. She tells Cecily, "If the poor fellow has been entrapped into any foolish promise, I shall consider it my duty to rescue him at once, and with a firm hand." Whatever her opinion, she states it very clearly. With her lorgnette, she views her world with the shortsightedness instilled in her by her Victorian mother—like mother, like daughter. However, this daughter occasionally chafes at the restraints placed on her by her class and time period. Humorously, Wilde displays Gwendolen's shortsightedness when he mentions her diary. Gwendolen's thoughts generally consist of observations about herself. She is totally self-absorbed, like most of the characters in Wilde's play.

Wilde links Cecily and Gwendolen very cleverly by using parallel conversations and by repeating bits and pieces of sentences. They both discuss liking and disliking each other with exactly the same words. Likewise, they both discuss marrying Ernest with the same phrases. Gwendolen says, "My first impressions of people are never wrong," and later counters with, "My first impressions of people are invariably right." Their artificial speech and comments on trivial subjects are part of polite conversation. Jack and Algernon are also linked with parallel lines that display the similarities in their situations. Jack says, "You won't be able to run down to the country quite so often as you used to do, dear Algy. And a very good thing too." Algernon parallels this line with "You won't be able to disappear to London quite so frequently as your wicked custom was. And not a bad thing either." The parallel words and lines are used almost like a minuet, where each partner circles around the other turning one way and then the other. Wilde has choreographed the lines to present a stylized, artificial milieu that exaggerates the art of manners and social discourse.

The culmination of Wilde's commentary on Victorian social rituals is the tea ceremony with Cecily and Gwendolen. This witty exchange of conversation is representative of Victorian social ritual where proposals, social calls, and parties are all carefully orchestrated. Because it is conducted under obvious duress, the tea becomes a ridiculous event. Throughout the tea pouring and the cake cutting, Cecily and Gwendolen are mindful of their manners in front of the servants. Even their anger is civilized. Once the servants leave they discover they are

Even their anger is civilized. Once the servants leave they discover they are engaged to the same man, and the conversation heats up considerably. The servants, however, provide a calming influence, and the women must simply glare at each other across the table. Their sarcasm is revealed in Wilde's stage directions. When Cecily makes a satirical comment about Gwendolen living in town because she does not like crowds—indicating that she has few friends and little social life—Gwendolen bites her lip and beats her foot nervously. Cecily is instructed to make this comment "sweetly." For her own part, Gwendolen calls Cecily a detestable girl, but her comment is made in an aside to the audience.

For their part, the servants continue to serve as an opportunity for Wilde to comment on the all-knowing-but-seldom-commenting lower class. Merriman's function is to announce people and events, warn of the approach of Lady Bracknell with a discrete cough, and watch the happenings with amusement but without registering this with his face or manners. He carries to the tea ceremony all the traditional hardware: a salver, a tablecloth, and a plate stand. Wilde says in his directions, "The presence of the servants exercises a restraining influence . . ." The women know they must not bicker in front of the hired help, and the servants understand that their very proximity will play a role in the outcome. Merriman asserts his mistress's role when he asks Cecily if he should lay the tea "as usual." Cecily answers, "sternly, in a calm voice, 'Yes, as usual.'" Mistress and servant are acknowledging her role as the lady of the house. Wilde seems to be asking what the British upper class would do without the stern but calming influence of its servants.

Several motifs that have been mentioned earlier are continued in this scene. Religion is once again referred to as a matter of form and format. The significance of a person's baptism is not even a matter for concern when Jack and Algernon get the canon to agree to baptize them. A person's rebirth is only a matter of a name on a piece of paper. It is a means to an end because it will get both men what they want: Cecily and Gwendolen.

Reform comes to mean the possibility that dissenters can be taught to see the error of their ways and conform to the status quo. Cecily's education is grooming her to be a member of the upper class, mindlessly repeating its virtues. She offers to reform Algernon, acting with forward zeal. She plans to turn Algernon into the perfect Ernest, a man who will be like other men and propose correctly, protect and support her financially, and stop his single life on the town.

Conventional Victorian values and behavior are often the subjects of bantering among the characters in this scene. Gwendolen is pleased that "outside the family circle" her father is unknown. Certainly idle gossip about the wealthy should not be a matter of public discussion. The appearance of Victorian family

should not be a matter of public discussion. The appearance of Victorian family life is for the man to be part of the domestic setting, but, as always, Wilde is saying that this appearance is the ideal while the reality is quite different.

Truth and deception also continue to be a part of Wilde's country world. Gwendolen passionately comments on Jack's honest and upright nature. "He is the very soul of truth and honour. Disloyalty would be as impossible to him as deception." Of course, the audience knows that her Ernest has lied about himself throughout the course of their courtship. Algernon also engages in deception in this scene when he acknowledges that his trip to Jack's estate has been the most wonderful bunburying trip of his life. What began as trivial has become an engagement. Both men accuse each other of deceiving the women in their lives, and Jack says that Algernon cannot marry Cecily because he has been deceptive to her. Alternatively, Algernon accuses Jack of engaging in deception toward his cousin, Gwendolen. By the end of the scene, it seems that marriage plans will not materialize for either of them anytime soon. Their deception as Ernests is definitely over, and now they must figure out how to pick up the pieces. The hypocrisy of Victorian virtues, paid lip service in public but invariably denied in private lives, is aptly represented by Jack and Algernon's behavior.

Glossary

effeminate having the qualities generally attributed to women, such as weakness, timidity, delicacy, and so on; unmanly; not virile.

the Morning Post a newspaper read by the upper class because of its reporting on engagements, marriages, and social gossip.

lorgnette a pair of eyeglasses attached to a handle.

"a restraining influence" the presence of servants that causes the principal characters to be careful in their speech.

machination an artful or secret plot or scheme.

Act III

Summary

No time has elapsed, but in Act III Gwendolen and Cecily are in the morning room of the Manor House, looking out the window at Jack and Algernon and hoping they will come in. If they do, the ladies intend to be cold and heartless. The men do come in and start explaining why they lied about their names. The women accept their explanations but still have a problem with them lacking the name Ernest. Both men proclaim that they plan to be rechristened, and Gwendolen and Cecily forgive them, and both couples embrace.

Merriman discretely coughs to signal the entrance of Lady Bracknell. She desires an explanation for these hugs, and Gwendolen tells her that she is engaged to Jack. Lady Bracknell says that they are not engaged and insists that they cease all communication. She inquires about Algernon's invalid friend, Bunbury, and Algernon explains that he killed him that afternoon; Bunbury exploded. He also adds that he and Cecily are engaged. Immediately, Lady Bracknell interrogates Jack about Cecily's expectations. However, because she has a fortune of 130,000 pounds, Lady Bracknell believes her to have "distinct social possibilities."

Lady Bracknell gives her consent to Algernon's engagement, but Jack immediately objects as Cecily's guardian. He says that Algernon is a liar and lists all the lies he has told. Also, Cecily does not come into her fortune and lose Jack as a guardian until she is 35 years old. Algernon says he can wait, but Cecily says she cannot. So Jack, in a moment of brilliance, declares that he will agree to the marriage if Lady Bracknell will consent to his engagement to Gwendolen. That is out of the question, and Lady Bracknell prepares to leave with Gwendolen.

Dr. Chasuble arrives and announces that he is ready for the christenings. Jack replies that they are useless now, and Chasuble decides to head back to the church where Miss Prism is waiting. The name Prism shocks Lady Bracknell, and she demands to see the governess. When Miss Prism arrives, she sees Lady Bracknell and turns pale. In a moment of great coincidence, Lady Bracknell reveals that Miss Prism left Lord Bracknell's house twenty-eight years ago. On a normal walk with the baby carriage, she disappeared, along with the baby. She

demands to know where the baby is. Prism explains that in a moment of great distraction, she placed the baby in her handbag and her three-volume manuscript in the baby carriage. The baby and handbag were accidentally left in the train station. When she discovered her error, she abandoned the baby carriage and disappeared. Jack excitedly asks her which station it was, and when she reveals that it was Victoria Station, the Brighton Line, he runs from the room and returns with a black leather bag. When Prism identifies it, he embraces her, believing her to be his mother. She protests that she is not married and says that he will have to ask Lady Bracknell for the identity of his mother.

Jack discovers that he is actually the son of Lady Bracknell's sister, Mrs. Moncrieff, and that Algy is his older brother. Jack is overcome to know that he really does have an unfortunate scoundrel for a brother. He asks what his christened name was, and Lady Bracknell explains that it is Ernest John. So, Jack asserts that he had been speaking the truth all along: His name is Ernest, and he does have a brother. Both couples embrace, as do Chasuble and Miss Prism, and Jack declares that he finally realizes the importance of being earnest.

Analysis

Act III offers happy resolution to the problems of identity and marriage that drive much of the humor in the previous acts. Wilde continues to mock the social customs and attitudes of the aristocratic class. He relentlessly attacks their values, views on marriage and respectability, sexual attitudes, and concern for stability in the social structure.

Wilde attacks social behavior with the continuation of speeches by his characters that are the opposite of their actions. While Cecily and Gwendolen agree to keep a dignified silence, Gwendolen actually states that they will not be the first ones to speak to the men. In the very next line she says, "Mr. Worthing, I have something very particular to ask you." Wilde seems to be saying that people speak as if they have strong opinions, but their actions do not support their words. If actions truly do speak louder than words, Wilde has made his point: Society, literally, speaks volumes, but the words are meaningless.

Wilde continues his criticism of society's valuing style over substance when Gwendolen says, "In matters of grave importance, style, not sincerity is the vital thing." Lady Bracknell discusses Algernon's marriage assets in the same light. She says, "Algernon is an extremely, I may almost say an ostentatiously, eligible young man. He has nothing, but he looks everything. What more can one desire?" Indeed, in a society where looks are everything and substance is discounted, Algernon is the perfect husband.

discounted, Algernon is the perfect husband.

What else do aristocrats value? They seem to esteem the appearance of respectability. Respectability means children are born within the context of marriage. Wilde once again mocks the hypocrisy of the aristocrats who appear to value monogamy but pretend not to notice affairs. Jack's speech to Miss Prism, whom he believes to be his mother, is humorous in both its indignant defense of marriage and also its mocking of the loudly touted religious reformer's virtues of repentance and forgiveness. He says to Miss Prism, "Unmarried! I do not deny that is a serious blow. . . . Mother, I forgive you." His words are all the more humorous when Miss Prism indignantly denies being his mother. It was not at all unusual for aristocrats to have children born out of wedlock, but society turned its head, pretended not to know about those children, and did not condemn their fathers.

The gulf between the upper class and its servants is explored in the scenes with Merriman and Prism. When Lady Bracknell unexpectedly shows up at Jack's, Merriman coughs discretely to warn the couples of her arrival. One can only imagine his humorous thoughts as he watches the wealthy tiptoe around each other and argue about what should be important. When Lady Bracknell hears the description of Prism and recognizes her as their former nanny, she calls for Miss Prism by shouting "Prism!" without using a title in front of her name. Imperiously, Lady Bracknell divides the servant from the lady of the manor. Wilde's audience would recognize this behavior on the part of the servants and the upper class. The stuffy class distinctions defined the society in which they lived.

In an age of social registers, Lady Bracknell laments that even the Court Guides have errors. In the next breath, she discusses bribing Gwendolen's maid to find out what is happening in her daughter's life. In Act III she also reveals that her aristocratic brother's family entrusted their most precious possession—Jack—to a woman who is more interested in her handbag and manuscript than in what happens to the baby in her charge. Wilde seems to be questioning the values of a society that believes in social registers, hires other people to neglectfully watch its children, and uses bribery to keep track of the children who are not missing.

The death of Bunbury gives Wilde the opportunity to speak of aristocratic fears and have some continued fun with the upper class's lack of compassion about death. The 1885 Trafalgar Square riots brought on ruling-class fears of insurrection, anarchism, and socialism. Wilde humorously touches on these fears when he allows Algernon to explain the explosion of Bunbury. Lady Bracknell, fearing the worst, exclaims, "Was he the victim of a revolutionary outrage? I was not aware that Mr. Bunbury was interested in social legislation. If so, he is

was not aware that Mr. Bunbury was interested in social legislation of [illegible], he is well punished for his morbidity." Evidently, to Lady Bracknell's acquaintances, laws that protect the welfare of those less fortunate are strictly morbid subjects. In fact, this attitude seems to contradict the upper-class concern for reform. However, in reality, Wilde is confirming the upper-class definition of social reform: conforming to the status quo.

In Act III Wilde makes a comment on the value of being homosexual with a veiled reference to Lady Lancing. When Lady Bracknell asserts that Cecily needs to have a more sophisticated hairstyle, she recommends "a thoroughly experienced French maid" who can make a great deal of change in a very short time. She explains that such a change happened to an acquaintance of hers, Lady Lancing, and that after three months "her own husband did not know her." Jack uses the opportunity to make a pun on the word *know,* using it in an aside—a comment only the audience can hear. Jack interprets *know* to mean they no longer had sex, insinuating Lady Lancing's preference for the French maid. He says, "And after six months nobody knew her," indicating that the homosexual experience made a new woman of her. Although homosexuality would have been seen as immoral to Wilde's audience, Jack indicates that being homosexual might be a good thing—almost as a social commentary—directly to the audience. It seems a double life is necessary after one is married, whether it be bunburying or the homosexual life Wilde was experiencing in an increasingly public way.

Wilde continues his assault on family life in Act III by mentioning its strange qualities in several conversations. It appears rather strange, for example, that Lady Bracknell cannot even recall the Christian name of her brother-in-law, Algy's father. Algernon's father died before Algernon was one, so stranger yet is Algernon's comment, "We were never even on speaking terms." He gives that as the reason he cannot remember his father's name. Further assaulting family life, Wilde has Lady Bracknell describe Lord Moncrieff as "eccentric" but excuses his behavior because it "was the result of the Indian climate, and marriage, and indigestions, and other things of that kind." Marriage is lumped together with things such as indigestion. In explaining Lord Moncrieff's marriage, Lady Bracknell says that he was "essentially a man of peace, except in his domestic life." Her description invites suspicion that the local constabulary might have visited because of domestic disturbances. Family life and domestic bliss do not get high marks in Wilde's estimation.

When Miss Prism humorously resolves the problem of Jack's lineage, Wilde takes his hero of unknown origins and paints him as the aristocrat who will now be assimilated into his rightful place in the social structure. Through the sad melodrama of Jack's handbag parentage, Wilde exaggerates the Victorian cliché

of the poor foundling who makes good. As soon as Jack is known to be a member of the established aristocracy, a Moncrieff in fact, he is seen as an appropriate person for Gwendolen to marry. They will, according to Wilde, live happily ever after in wedded bliss and continue the aristocratic blindness to anything that truly matters.

The tag line of the play, spoken by Jack, is a familiar convention in Victorian farces. In discovering that he has been telling the truth all along—his name is Ernest, and he has a brother—Jack makes fun of the Victorian virtues of sincerity and honesty and asks Gwendolen to forgive him for "speaking nothing but the truth." He now realizes the importance of being the person he is supposed to be. Wilde is saying perhaps that a new kind of earnestness exists, one that is different from the virtues extolled by the Victorians. Maybe it is possible to be honest and understand what should be taken seriously in life rather than being deceptive, hypocritical, and superficial. Some readers believe, however, that the ending shows Jack mockingly redefining Victorian earnestness as just the opposite: a life of lies, pleasure, and beauty. Critics debate the interpretation of the last line.

A curious stage direction occurs in Act III, revealing the concern Wilde had for the staging of his play to compliment his ideas. As his couples come together and move apart, he emphasizes the choreography of the pairs. He has them speak in unison, both the women together and the men together. It matters not who they are; they are interchangeable. Marriage is simply an institution that is a gesture, like a christening. The unison speaking is very stylistic, not meant to be realistic at all. It reveals Wilde's attitude that what is important in Victorian marriage—names—really should not be as important as other considerations.

In the end, Wilde leaves his audience thinking about the trivial social conventions they deem important. Their Victorian virtues perhaps need redefining. Institutions such as marriage, religion, family values, and money should perhaps have new interpretations. The character of people, rather than their names and family fortunes, should weigh most heavily when considering their worth. Wilde was able to use humor to skewer these attitudes and convince his audience about the importance of being earnest.

Glossary

effrontery unashamed boldness.

German skepticism a German philosophy that examines style or appearance rather than substance.

University Extension Scheme The University of London began these extension courses that were early developments in adult education.

terminus (British) either the end of a transportation line, or a station or town located there; terminal.

Court Guides an annual reference manual listing the names and addresses of members of the upper class and aristocracy.

Funds government stocks that give a low yield of interest but are conservative and safe.

Oxonian someone who graduated from Oxford University.

Anabaptists a religious group that believes the only form of baptism should be complete immersion of the body in water.

pew-opener a person who works for a church by opening the private pews of the wealthy.

perambulator (chiefly British) a baby carriage; buggy.

Temperance beverage a drink that expressly does not contain alcohol.

Army Lists published lists of commissioned officers in the British Army.

Character Analysis

John (Jack) Worthing

Jack Worthing, like the other main characters in Wilde's play, is less a realistic character and more an instrument for representing a set of ideas or attitudes. Wilde uses him to represent an upper-class character easily recognized by his audience. Jack also gives Wilde an opportunity to explore attitudes about Victorian rituals such as courtship and marriage. As an alter ego of Wilde, Jack represents the idea of leading a life of respectability on the surface (in the country) and a life of deception for pleasure (in the city). His name, Worthing, is related to worthiness, allowing Wilde to humorously consider the correct manners of Victorian society.

As a recognized upper-class Victorian, Jack has earned respectability only because of his adopted father's fortune. It has put him in a position to know the rules of behavior of polite society. His ability to spout witty lines about trivial subjects and say the opposite of what is known to be true are learned results of his position. When Lady Bracknell questions his qualifications for marrying her daughter, he knows she wants to hear about his pedigree. He recognizes that he needs the correct parents along with his wealth.

Of particular significance is Jack's role in the dialogues about social attitudes and rituals, such as courtship and marriage. He often plays the straight man to counter Algernon's humor, but occasionally, he gets the witty lines. Respectability is also a function of Jack's character. Although he leads a deceptive life in town, he represents the ideal of leading a responsible life in the country. He agrees more with the idea of Victorian earnestness or duty than Algernon does. However, because he deceives people in the city, he is still a symbol of Wilde's deceptive life of pleasure in the homosexual community. Jack longs for the respectability of marrying Gwendolen and is willing to do whatever it takes. In the long run, he assumes his rightful place in the very society he has occasionally skewered for its attitudes. Wilde is able to soften Jack's respectability and position as a symbol of the ruling class by showing his enormous sense of humor. The funeral garb for his fake brother's death and the story about the French maid both show that while Jack longs for respectability, he still has the wit and rebelliousness to recognize the ridiculous nature of trivial Victorian concerns.

Algernon (Algy) Moncrieff

Algernon Moncrieff is a member of the wealthy class, living a life of total bachelorhood in a fashionable part of London. He is younger than Jack, takes less responsibility, and is always frivolous and irreverent. As a symbol, he is wittiness and aestheticism personified. He—like Jack—functions as a Victorian male with a life of deception. Unlike Jack, he is much more self-absorbed, allowing Wilde to discuss Victorian repression and guilt, which often result in narcissism.

Along with Lady Bracknell, Algy is given witty lines and epigrams showing his humor and disrespect for the society he will inherit. In discussing the music for Lady Bracknell's reception, Algernon says, "Of course the music is a great difficulty. You see, if one plays good music, people don't listen, and if one plays bad music, people don't talk." This is Algernon's wit and wisdom contained in a single line. Occasionally, he even congratulates himself on his humor: "It's perfectly phrased!" He poses and moves luxuriously about the stage with the studied languor of the aesthete who has nothing to do but admire his own wittiness. One might certainly see him as a representation of Wilde's cleverness and position in the aesthetic cult of the 1890s.

Parallel to Wilde in deception, Algernon is leading a double life. He uses an imaginary invalid friend, Bunbury, to get out of boring engagements and to provide excitement in the otherwise dull life of Victorian England. As he says, "A man who marries without knowing Bunbury has a very tedious time of it." This secrecy, of course, was also a facet of Wilde's life, which was unraveling before his Victorian audiences all too quickly by the time the play opened in London. With his irreverent attitudes about marrying and his propensity for a secret life, Algernon represents the rule-breaker side of Oscar Wilde—the side that eventually would meet its downfall in a notorious trial.

Finally, Algernon functions as an expression of the lengths to which Victorians had to go to escape the stifling moral repression and guilt brought about by a society that values appearance over reality. Algernon's constant references to eating and his repeated actions of gorging himself on cucumber sandwiches, muffins, and whatever food might be handy are symbols of total self-absorption, lust, and the physical pleasures denied by polite society. Just as institutions such as the church (Chasuble) and the education system (Prism) function to keep people on the straight and narrow, human nature denies these

restrictions and seems to have a will of its own. Algernon symbolizes the wild, unrestricted, curly-headed youngster who is happiest breaking the rules.

Lady Augusta Bracknell

The most memorable character and one who has a tremendous impact on the audience is Lady Augusta Bracknell. Wilde's audience would have identified most with her titled position and bearing. Wilde humorously makes her the tool of the conflict, and much of the satire. For the play to end as a comedy, her objections and obstacles must be dealt with and overcome.

Lady Bracknell is first and foremost a symbol of Victorian earnestness and the unhappiness it brings as a result. She is powerful, arrogant, ruthless to the extreme, conservative, and proper. In many ways, she represents Wilde's opinion of Victorian upper-class negativity, conservative and repressive values, and power.

Her opinions and mannerisms betray a careful and calculated speaking pattern. She is able to go round for round with the other characters on witty epigrams and social repartee. Despite her current position, Lady Bracknell was not always a member of the upper class; she was a social climber bent on marrying into the aristocracy. As a former member of the lower class, she represents the righteousness of the formerly excluded. Because she is now *Lady* Bracknell, she has opinions on society, marriage, religion, money, illness, death, and respectability. She is another of Wilde's inventions to present his satire on these subjects.

As a ruthless social climber and spokesperson for the status quo, Lady Bracknell's behavior enforces social discrimination and excludes those who do not fit into her new class. Her daughter's unsuitable marriage is an excellent example of how she flexes her muscles. She sees marriage as an alliance for property and social security; love or passion is not part of the mix. She bends the rules to suit her pleasure because she can. Jack will be placed on her list of eligible suitors only if he can pass her unpredictable and difficult test. She gives him ruthlessly "correct," but immoral, advice on his parents. "I would strongly advise you, Mr. Worthing, to try and acquire some relations as soon as possible, and to make a definite effort to produce at any rate one parent, of either sex, before the season is quite over." It matters not how Jack finds parent(s), just that he do it, following the requirements for acceptability.

Lady Bracknell's authority and power are extended over every character in the play. Her decision about the suitability of both marriages provides the conflict of the story. She tells her daughter quite explicitly, "Pardon me, you are not

engaged to anyone. When you do become engaged to someone, I or your father, should his health permit him, will inform you of the fact." Done, decided, finished. She interrogates both Jack and Cecily, bribes Gwendolen's maid, and looks down her nose at both Chasuble and Prism.

Her social commentary on class structure is Wilde's commentary about how the privileged class of England keeps its power. Lady Bracknell firmly believes the middle and lower classes should never be taught to think or question. It would breed anarchy and the possibility that the upper class might lose its privileged position.

Wilde has created, with Augusta Bracknell, a memorable instrument of his satiric wit, questioning all he sees in Victorian upper-class society.

Gwendolen Fairfax & Cecily Cardew

Both Gwendolen Fairfax and Cecily Cardew provide Wilde with opportunities to discuss ideas and tout the New Woman near the turn of the century. They are curiously similar in many ways, but as the writer's tools, they have their differences.

Both women are smart, persistent, and in pursuit of goals in which they take the initiative. Gwendolen follows Jack to the country—an atmosphere rather alien to her experiences—and Cecily pursues Algernon from the moment she lays eyes on him. Both women are perfectly capable of outwitting their jailers. Gwendolen escapes from her dominating mother, Lady Bracknell; Cecily outwits Jack by arranging for Algernon to stay, and she also manages to escape Miss Prism to carry on a tryst with her future fiancé. The first moment Cecily meets Algernon, she firmly explains her identity with a no-nonsense reaction to his patronizing comment.

For both women, appearances and style are important. Gwendolen must have the perfect proposal performed in the correct manner and must marry a man named Ernest simply because of the name's connotations. Cecily also craves appearance and style. She believes Jack's brother is a wicked man, and though she has never met such a man, she thinks the idea sounds romantic. She toys with rebelliously and romantically pursuing the "wicked brother," but she has full intentions of reforming him to the correct and appropriate appearance. The respectable name of Ernest for a husband is important to her. Both women, despite their differences, are products of a world in which how one does something is more important than why.

Cecily and Gwendolen are dissimilar in some aspects of their personalities and backgrounds. Gwendolen, on one hand, is confident, worldly, and at home in the big city of London. While her mother has taught her to be shortsighted like the lorgnette through which Gwendolen peers at the world, she has also brought her daughter up in a traditional family, the only such family in the entire play. On the other hand, Cecily is introduced in a garden setting, the child of a more sheltered, natural, and less-sophisticated enviromnent. She has no mother figure other than the grim Miss Prism, and she has a guardian instead of a parent.

Gwendolen provides Wilde with the opportunity to discuss marriage, courtship, and the absurdities of life. Her pronouncements on trivialities and her total contradictions of what she said two lines earlier make her the perfect

instrument for Wilde to provide humor and to comment on inane Victorian attitudes. Cecily provides Wilde with an opportunity to discuss dull and boring education, Victorian values, money and security, and the repression of passion. More sheltered than Gwendolen, Cecily is still expected to learn her boring lessons and make a good marriage.

Both women seem ideally matched to their fiancés. Gwendolen is very no-nonsense and straightforward like Jack. She believes in appearances, upper-class snobbery, correct behavior, and the ability to discuss, ad nauseam, the trivial. Jack too is practical and takes his responsibilities quite seriously. While he has a sense of humor, he also realizes—especially in the country—that he must maintain a proper image and pay his bills. Cecily and Algernon are both guided by passion and immediate gratification. More emotional than their counterparts, they pursue life with a vengeance, aiming for what they desire and oblivious to the consequences. Both couples indulge in witty epigrams and are perfectly matched.

While Wilde spends most of his play satirizing Victorian ideals of courtship and marriage, he gets the last laugh with his female characters. Despite their positions in society as victims of the machinations of men, marriage contracts, and property, the women are the strong characters who are firmly in control. Wilde provides two female characters who lack Lady Bracknell's ruthlessness, but who have the strength and practical sense that the men lack.

Rev. Chasuble & Miss Prism

These two comic and slightly grotesque caricatures are less developed than the principal players, and Wilde uses them to comment on religion and morality.

The minister is an intellectual character who speaks in metaphors. He is a "typical" country vicar who refers often to canon law and gives fatherly advice. Absent-mindedly in charge of his parishioners' souls, he performs christenings and interchangeable sermons, depending on the situation. Occasionally, however, his mask slips, and an interior world of lusty desire for Miss Prism appears. Often absent-minded, but always spouting moral platitudes, he symbolizes Wilde's view of Victorian religion and respectability.

Miss Prism is also intellectual, but in a literary way. She is a creative writer and a parody of "a woman with a past." She clearly had dreams of becoming a sensational romantic novelist, but, alas, she must make a living, so she is instead the jailer of Cecily and the guardian of her education and virtue. She, like the minister, makes constant moral judgments. Her favorite line, even to dead Ernest, is "As a man sows, so shall he reap." Repeating this often allows Wilde to show how meaningless and clichéd religion and values have become. As an instrument of the aristocracy, Miss Prism educates Cecily to conform to the dry, meaningless intellectual pursuits designed to keep the status quo. But, like Chasuble, beneath her surface she has a hedonistic streak; often her language slips when she ventures outside her Victorian appearance. She persists in inviting Chasuble to discuss marriage, pursues him diligently, and falls into his arms at the end.

Miss Prism is an appropriate character to uncover Jack's true history because she also is not what she seems. Wilde uses her to show what happens when dreams cannot be pursued in a society of strict social structure and stringent moral guidelines. Both she and Chasuble—with their lack of social opportunities—become servants to the system, promoting its continuation.

Oscar Wilde Biography

Early Years

Oscar Wilde's unconventional life began with an equally unconventional family. He was born Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde on October 16, 1854, at 21 Westland Row, Dublin, Ireland. His father, Sir William Wilde, was an eminent Victorian and a doctor of aural surgery.

Wilde's mother, Jane Francesca Elgee (or Lady Wilde), saw herself as a revolutionary and liked to trace her family through the Italian line of Alighieris, including Dante. An Irish nationalist, she wrote under the pen name Speranza. She attracted artists like herself and established a literary salon devoted to intellectual and artistic conversations of the day, through which Lady Wilde brought literature, an interest in art and culture, and an elegance and appreciation for wit into the lives of her children.

Wilde had two siblings: an older brother named Willie, born in 1852, and a sister, Isola, born in 1856, but who died at the age of 10. These offspring would not experience a standard, conventional childhood. Through their home passed intellectuals, artists, and internationally known doctors—and the children were not left to a governess or nanny. Allowed to mingle and eat with the guests, they learned to value intellectual and witty conversation, an influence that would have profound and long-lasting effects on young Oscar Wilde.

Education, Travel, and Celebrity

Wilde was given the advantage of a superior education. At age 11, he entered the exclusive Portora Royal School and began to assert the scholarship and intellect that would bring him both great celebrity and great sadness. His long interest in all things Greek began at Portora. Winning several prizes, he was already a first-rate classics scholar and ready to pursue serious studies.

Wilde went on to Trinity College where he extended his interest in the classics and his long list of intellectual accomplishments. He won an additional scholarship, made first class in examinations, received a composition prize for Greek verse, and the Berkeley Gold Medal for Greek. In 1874 he received a

scholarship to Magdalen College in Oxford. His lifelong love of the classics would continue through his university career and immensely influence his subsequent writing. Little did he know what turns and twists his life would take when he entered Oxford and came under the influence of three very powerful professors.

Wilde's four years at Oxford (1874–1878) were dizzy, personality-changing times. By graduation he was firmly committed to the pursuit of pleasure and the careful devising of a public persona, which included unconventional clothing and the pose of a dandy. Wilde's direction in life changed because of the influence of three professors—Ruskin, Pater, and Mahaffy.

The magnetism of Professor John Ruskin, author of *Modern Painters* and *The Stones of Venice*, attracted Wilde's imagination. Ruskin believed civilizations could be judged by their art, which must consider and reflect moral values. Ruskin also stirred Wilde's aristocratic soul with social concerns in his insistence that his students identify with the working class and do manual labor. His influence on Wilde's social conscience is undeniable, and it permeates Wilde's plays and his essay, "The Soul of Man Under Socialism." Wilde did not, however, agree with Ruskin on the moral purposes of art. Influenced by Keats and his ideas of truth and beauty, he believed art should be loved and appreciated for its own sake.

Yet another Oxford influence was Professor Walter Pater, author of *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* and *Marius the Epicurian.* His prose style influenced young Wilde, and his ideas seemed to fit Wilde's newfound proclivities. Pater emphasized art for art's sake and urged his students to live with passion and for sensual pleasure, testing new ideas and not conforming to the orthodoxy. Pater was planting seeds in fertile ground. The Aesthetic Movement, an avant-garde philosophy of the 1870s, was in full bloom, and its advocates were critical of the heavy, moralistic Victorian taste. They wanted to pursue forms of beauty in opposition to the art and architecture of the day. Wilde could not agree more. He went overboard into aesthetics, adopting extravagant clothing styles, which continued when he left Oxford for London in 1878. He thought of himself as an aesthete, poet, writer, and nonconformist—and he wanted to be famous or at least infamous.

A third influence on Wilde at Oxford was Mahaffy, an Oxford professor of ancient history. Professor Mahaffy took him along on trips to Italy and Greece.

By 1878, when Wilde completed his degree at Oxford, he had won the coveted Newdigate Prize for his poem "Ravenna." Leaving Oxford, Wilde was now ready to take on the world with a classical education and an unequivocal inclination toward the unconventional. Wilde proved to be a master of public relations. Virtually unknown and unpublished, he single-handedly created his

relations. Virtually unknown and unpublished, he single-handedly created his own celebrity. While his travels and lectures increased his fame both in England and abroad, his early writings were not critical successes.

London in the 1870s provided Wilde the opportunity to build a public persona and test the limits of what society would tolerate. He dressed in strange clothes and often sported flowers such as lilies and sunflowers. He built a reputation as a minor luminary by courting celebrities. In 1880, he privately printed his first play, *Vera*, and the following year published his first book of poems. The poems were a modest success, but the play died a quick death.

In April 1881, Gilbert and Sullivan opened a play titled *Patience* in which a primary character, Bunthorne, was assumed to be based on Wilde. This false assumption was promoted by Wilde through early attendance—in outrageous clothes—at the play. When the play moved on to New York in December 1881, Richard D'Oyly Carte, the producer, hired Wilde to do a series of lectures to introduce the play to American audiences. The press was alerted and ready for his arrival, and Wilde played to them by proclaiming at customs that he had nothing to declare but his genius.

What began as a modest tour ripened into a six-month nationwide tour. He spoke in New York, Chicago, Boston, Fort Wayne (Indiana), Omaha (Nebraska), Philadelphia, and Washington. He even lectured in the mining town of Leadville, Colorado, where his ability to hold his liquor brought him a silver drill and the good-humored admiration of the miners. America seemed intrigued by Wilde's odd character, and he, in turn, admired many things American, including the democratic insistence on universal education. While in America, Wilde's lectures included "The English Renaissance of Art," "The House Beautiful," and "Decorative Art in America." As a celebrity, he dined with Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Charles Eliot Norton (the famous Harvard professor), and Walt Whitman. He also had audiences with Lincoln's son, Robert, and Jefferson Davis.

Following his triumphant tour, Wilde had enough money to spend three months in Paris. There he finished a forgettable play titled *The Duchess of Padua*. He was befriended once again by celebrities; this time they were Europeans: Zola, Hugo, Verlaine, Gide, Toulouse-Lautrec, Degas, and Pissarro. Obviously, early training at his mother's salon had paid off.

He returned to London looking for backers to produce his play. In an attempt to garner backing, he cut his hair short and dressed more conservatively. When he was unsuccessful in finding producers, he arranged for a production in New York for $1,000. The play was not successful, closing in less than a week. So, Wilde went back to England, arranging a lecture tour of Great Britain and Ireland, where he encountered a previous acquaintance, Constance Lloyd, who

Ireland, where he encountered a previous acquaintance, Constance Lloyd, who would become his wife—for better or for worse.

Marriage and Commercial Success

During the seven years between his wedding to Constance and his first introduction to a young man who would become part of his downfall—Lord Alfred Douglas—Wilde settled down to a life of domestic respectability as a husband and father. By all accounts the Wildes' marriage was happy, producing two sons: Cyril in June 1885 and Vyvyan in November 1886. Wilde played often with his children and loved them immensely. To support them he wrote book reviews for newspapers and magazines, including the *Pall Mall Gazette* and the *Dramatic Review*. Occasionally, he lectured. *The Lady's World* magazine named him its editor in 1887, and he converted it from a fashion magazine to *The Woman's World* with essays about women's viewpoints on art, music, literature, and modern life. He wrote essays that took women seriously as creative and intelligent human beings. When he was an editor, Wilde's life was financially more secure. In 1888 he wrote a book of fairy tales titled *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*, and in 1889 he wrote an essay titled "The Decay of Lying." He left the magazine in July 1889 to begin his greatest period of play writing.

A Playwright with a Secret Life

Within six months of leaving *The Woman's World*, Wilde had published the commercially successful novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, about a man with a secret life. This novel was quickly followed by *Intentions*, *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime and Other Stories*, and *A House of Pomegranates*. In the period from 1891 to 1892, he produced *Salome*, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, *A Woman of No Importance*, and an essay, "The Soul of Man Under Socialism." He amused his audiences, and in return they offered standing ovations at his plays.

One would think all this good luck, publicity, and commercial success would be enough for a respectable married man with two sons, who finally was receiving acceptance from British aristocracy. However, during this amazingly prolific period, Wilde was beginning to frequent literary circles that were often homosexual. In 1886, he is said to have had his first homosexual affair with a Canadian named Robert Ross. He was also introduced to Alfred Taylor, who lived in Bloomsbury and often had male prostitutes at his home. One of these young men was the unemployed Charles Parker. Wilde became involved with

several of these young men, who later testified against him at trial.

In 1891, Oscar Wilde met the young man who would change his life forever. Lord Alfred Douglas (known as Bosie) was the 21-year-old son of the Marquis of Queensberry. A very controversial figure, Douglas was often described as femininely beautiful, aristocratic, rich, homosexual, and poetic. His hold on Wilde has often been a subject of conjecture, but most writers believe that Wilde, fourteen years Bosie's senior, was infatuated, obsessed, and besotted. By 1892, the two were together constantly. They traveled to France, Italy, and Algiers. Wilde rented homes for them outside London, and when they were apart he wrote letters and was careless with their whereabouts.

Wilde enjoyed unprecedented success in the London theatres from 1893 to 1895. He had two plays running simultaneously in the West End: *A Woman of No Importance* opened at the Royal Theatre, Haymarket, in January 1893, and *Lady Windermere's Fan* began in November of that same year. From August through September 1894, he wrote *The Importance of Being Earnest* at the seaside resort of Worthing, Sussex, his wife and children enjoying the holiday with him. By 1895, he had the acclaim of all London for his witty society plays. However, he was also increasingly indiscreet about his personal life. The year 1895 marked the beginning of the end of his public acceptance and the privacy of his secret life.

Disaster and Ruin

Rumors about Wilde's secret life were already circulating in 1895, but he was still very amusing, and as long as his indiscretions were kept quiet, society did not care. *The Importance of Being Earnest* opened on February 14 at St. James' Theatre, beginning a run of eighty-six performances to standing ovations. On February 28, the Marquis of Queensberry left a card for Wilde at his club, the Albemarle Club. It read: "To Oscar Wilde, posing as a sodomite." (Actually, sodomite was misspelled.) Estranged from his father and hating him, Douglas encouraged Wilde to sue the Marquis for libel. Convinced he could triumph in court, Wilde declared to his lawyers that he was innocent and wanted to press the lawsuit. His friends, knowing he had been too indiscreet, urged him to go abroad with his wife until it all blew over, but Wilde intended to carry through with the case. The Marquis hired detectives and, using Alfred Taylor and his young prostitutes, Queensberry effectively put Wilde on trial for homosexuality.

The libel trial was disastrous. When the prosecution threatened to bring in male prostitutes to testify, Wilde dropped the case and left in disgrace. But

tragedy was not over for Oscar Wilde. In 1885, Parliament had passed the Criminal Law Amendment Act. It was used to try acts of "gross indecency" between men and sometimes could result in hanging. Being a homosexual was not a crime; the sexual act itself was. When the first trial ended, Queensberry's lawyers sent a transcript of the trial to public prosecutors. Home Secretary Herbert Asquith decided to arrest, imprison, and try Wilde, but he delayed the warrant long enough for Wilde to leave on the last boat-train to France. Wilde, for various reasons, remained in England and was arrested. A new trial would take place, indicting Wilde.

The press had a heyday, viciously attacking Wilde and holding up Queensberry—hardly a model citizen. They pictured Wilde as a deviant but could not print the crime with which he was charged. Unflattering cartoons and caricatures appeared in magazines such as *Punch*, and Wilde was pictured in unmanly clothes with flowers in his lapel. The court found Wilde guilty and sentenced him to two years at hard labor.

Today, transcripts of the trials can be read in H. Montgomery Hyde's *The Trials of Oscar Wilde* (The Notable Trials Library by Gryphon Editions, Inc., 1989). Just as Wilde's plays noted the huge gulf between the rich and the working class, the trials themselves displayed the disparity. Lord Alfred Douglas, protected by his powerful family name, was never charged, even though the jury inquired about this because he had committed the same crime. The names of upper-class people associated with the case could not be mentioned in court; in fact, some witnesses were instructed to write a name rather than say it aloud. The names of working class people, however, were readily identified aloud.

The immediate aftermath of the trial was a total disgrace for Wilde. He was abandoned by his friends, his book sales ended, his plays were closed down, and his belongings were sold at auction at low prices. He began his sentence in Newgate Prison but was moved to different prisons over the next two years.

Oscar Wilde was not a man well equipped to face such solitary adversity. His world was normally one of social calendars and lots of people. He was moved to Pentonville Prison where he spent twenty-three hours a day in poorly ventilated cells and one hour exercising without speaking to anyone. His cell was unsanitary, and his bed was nothing more than wooden boards. The food was unspeakable, and he could only read the *Bible*, a prayer book, and a hymn book. Wilde was not allowed photos of his wife or children or allowed to write or receive more than one letter in three months. In February 1896, his mother dying, Wilde requested leave to go to her. His request was denied; Constance

visited the prison on February 19 to tell him in person of his mother's death. It was their last meeting.

By now Wilde had lost thirty pounds, and was not doing well physically or emotionally. He was transferred to Wandsworth Prison. A parliamentary committee looking into prison conditions took up his case and, because he was destitute, transferred him to Reading Gaol—a debtors' prison—for the remainder of his time. While he was there, Wilde wrote a famous letter to Douglas justifying his life and position, which was later published as "De Profundis." When he left this prison on May 19, 1897, he was in decent health and departed immediately for France, never to return to England.

Last Years

Wilde's last years were spent in several towns in Europe. He settled in the small village of Berneval-sur-Mer near Dieppe, France, and sent letters to newspapers on prison reform while writing his greatest poem, "The Ballad of Reading Gaol." His wife Constance had settled in Italy with the boys, changing their name to Holland because of the scandal. Wilde wanted to see her and the children, but she refused because he would not give up Douglas. He and Bosie reunited, and Constance died in April 1898. There was no more writing; Wilde drank heavily and begged money from friends. He and Bosie moved to Naples, Switzerland, and Paris, but Wilde's health was fading. During his time in prison, he had found an admiration for Jesus Christ and had written about his religious convictions. Just prior to his death in Paris on November 30, 1900, at the age of 46, Wilde converted to Roman Catholicism.

Over the last century and a half, many people have believed that Wilde died of cerebral meningitis, complicated by syphilis, and many have seen it as proof of his depravity. However, a November 2000 article in the British journal, *Lancet*, blames meningoencephalitis, complicated by a chronic right middle-ear disease. Wilde was treated before and during his imprisonment for a chronic ear infection. Surgery for an acute and life-threatening infection, which had moved into the mastoid, was allegedly performed on October 10, 1900, and was documented in Wilde's letters. He suffered a relapse in November of that year and fell into a coma, never to awaken. His son, Vyvyan, ironically underwent a similar operation for mastoid infection less than two months after his father died.

Wilde's death did not end the public's appreciation of his marvelous wit and staging. *The Importance of Being Earnest* returned to the West End with revivals

in 1902, 1909, 1911, and 1913. The original producer, George Alexander, willed the copyright of the play to Wilde's son, Vyvyan.

After Wilde's death, many friends and acquaintances destroyed his letters for fear that their own reputations would be tainted by his scandal. Even letters to Constance during his imprisonment were destroyed. Most popular and academic writing about Wilde, since his death, has been about the scandal and speculation concerning his private life. His writing was largely ignored or devalued until the 1960s and 1970s. Now Wilde is often classified as a literary figure whose sensibilities, witticisms, and theatrical staging reflected the social commentary of the nineteenth century and influenced the theatre of the twentieth century.

Critical Essays

Themes in *The Importance of Being Earnest*

Duty and Respectability

The aristocratic Victorians valued duty and respectability above all else. *Earnestness*—a determined and serious desire to do the correct thing—was at the top of the code of conduct. Appearance was everything, and style was much more important than substance. So, while a person could lead a secret life, carry on affairs within marriage, or have children outside of wedlock, society would look the other way as long as the appearance of propriety was maintained. For this reason, Wilde questions whether the more important or serious issues of the day are overlooked in favor of trivial concerns about appearance. Gwendolen is the paragon of this value. Her marriage proposal must be performed correctly, and her brother even practices correct proposals. Gwendolen's aristocratic attitude is "In matters of grave importance, style, not sincerity is the vital thing." The trivial is important; the serious is overlooked.

The tea ceremony in Act II is a hilarious example of Wilde's contention that manners and appearance are everything. The guise of correctness is the framework for war. Both women, thinking they are engaged to the same person, wage a civilized "war" over the tea service while the servants silently watch. When Gwendolen requests no sugar, Cecily adds four lumps to her cup. Although she asks for bread and butter, Gwendolen is given a large slice of cake. Her true feelings come out only in an aside that Cecily supposedly cannot hear: "Detestable girl!" Gwendolen is also appalled to find that Cecily is living in Jack's country home, and she inquires about a chaperone. Wilde gives examples again and again of the aristocrat's concern for propriety, that everything is done properly no matter what those good manners might be camouflaging.

The Absence of Compassion

Two areas in which the Victorians showed little sympathy or compassion were illness and death. When Lady Bracknell hears that Bunbury died after his doctors told him he could not live, she feels he has—in dying—acted appropriately because he had the correct medical advice. "Illness of any kind is

hardly a thing to be encouraged in others. Health is the primary duty of life. Lady Bracknell, like other aristocrats, is too busy worrying about her own life, the advantages of her daughter's marriage, and her nephew's errors in judgment to feel any compassion for others. Gwendolen, learning from her mother, is totally self-absorbed and definite about what she wants. She tells Cecily, "I never travel without my diary. One should have something sensational to read in the train." Wilde seems to be taking to task a social class that thinks only of itself, showing little compassion or sympathy for the trials of those less fortunate.

Religion

Another serious subject—religion—is also a topic of satire. While concerns of the next world would be an appropriate topic for people of this world, it seems to be shoved aside in the Victorian era. Canon Chasuble is the symbol of religious thought, and Wilde uses him to show how little the Victorians concerned themselves with attitudes reflecting religious faith. Chasuble can rechristen, marry, bury, and encourage at a moment's notice with interchangeable sermons filled with meaningless platitudes. Even Lady Bracknell mentions that christenings are a waste of time and, especially, money. Chasuble's pious exterior betrays a racing pulse for Miss Prism: "Were I fortunate enough to be Miss Prism's pupil, I would hang upon her lips." Quickly correcting his error, the minister hides his hardly holy desires in the language of metaphor. Wilde's satire here is gentle and humorous, chiding a society for its self-importance.

Popular Culture

The popular attitudes of the day about the French, literary criticism, and books are also subjects of Wilde's humor. Wilde wittily asserts that Victorians believe that nothing good comes from France, except for (in Wilde's mind) the occasional lesbian maid. Otherwise, France is a good place to kill off and request the burial of Ernest. As the good reverend says, "I fear that hardly points to any very serious state of mind at the last." Literary criticism is for "people who haven't been at a University. They do it so well in the daily papers." Modern books are filled with truths that are never pure or simple, and scandalous books should be read but definitely in secret. Again Wilde criticizes the Victorians for believing that appearance is much more important than truth. He takes the opportunity to insert many examples of popular thought, revealing bias, social

bigotry, thoughtlessness, and blind assumptions.

Secret Lives

Because Victorian norms were so repressive and suffocating, Wilde creates episodes in which his characters live secret lives or create false impressions to express who they really are. Jack and Algernon both create personas to be free. These other lives allow them to neglect their duties—in Algernon's case—or to leave their duties and pursue pleasure—in Jack's case. Very early in Act I, Wilde sets up these secret lives, and they follow through until the final act. When Jack and Algernon realize their marriages will end their pursuit of pleasure, they both admit rather earnestly, "You won't be able to run down to the country quite so often as you used to do, dear Algy," and "You won't be able to disappear to London quite so frequently as your wicked custom was." Marriage means the end of freedom, pleasure, wickedness, and the beginning of duty and doing what is expected. Of course, Jack and Algernon could continue to don their masks after they marry Gwendolen and Cecily, but they will have to be cautious and make sure society is looking the other way.

Passion and Morality

Wilde's contention that a whole world exists separate from Victorian manners and appearances is demonstrated in the girlish musings of Cecily. When she hears that Jack's "wicked" brother Ernest is around, she is intensely desirous of meeting him. She says to Algernon, "I hope you have not been leading a double life, pretending to be wicked and being really good all the time." The thought of meeting someone who lives outside the bounds of prudery and rules is exciting to naïve Cecily. Even using the name Ernest for his secret life is ironic because Algernon is not being dutiful—earnest—in living a secret life.

Various characters in the play allude to passion, sex, and moral looseness. Chasuble and Prism's flirting and coded conversations about things sexual, Algernon stuffing his face to satisfy his hungers, the diaries (which are the acceptable venues for passion), and Miss Prism's three-volume novel are all examples of an inner life covered up by suffocating rules. Even Algernon's aesthetic life of posing as the dandy, dressing with studied care, neglecting his bills, being unemployed, and pursuing pleasure instead of duty is an example of Victorians valuing trivialities. Once Algernon marries he will have suffocating

rules and appearances to keep up. Wilde's characters allude to another life beneath the surface of Victorian correctness. Much of the humor in this play draws a fine line between the outer life of appearances and the inner life of rebellion against the social code that says life must be lived earnestly.

Courtship and Marriage

Oscar Wilde felt these Victorian values were perpetuated through courtship and marriage, both of which had their own rules and rituals. Marriage was a careful selection process. When Algernon explains that he plans to become engaged to Jack's ward, Cecily, Lady Bracknell decides, "I think some preliminary enquiry on my part would not be out of place." When Lady Bracknell pummels Jack with questions about parents, politics, fortune, addresses, expectations, family solicitors, and legal encumbrances, his answers must be proper and appropriate for a legal union between the two families to be approved. Fortune is especially important, and when Jack and Cecily's fortunes are both appropriate, the next problem is family background. Because Jack does not know his parents, Lady Bracknell suggests he find a parent—any with the right lineage will do—and find one quickly. Appearance, once again, is everything. Duty (not joy, love, or passion) is important, further substantiating Algy's contention that marriage is a loveless duty: "A man who marries without knowing Bunbury [an excuse for pleasure] has a very tedious time of it." Marriage is presented as a legal contract between consenting families of similar fortunes; background, love, and happiness have little to do with it.

Perpetuating the Upper Class

The strict Victorian class system, in which members of the same class marry each other, perpetuates the gulf between the upper, middle, and lower classes. Snobbish, aristocratic attitudes further preserve the distance between these groups. Jack explains to Lady Bracknell that he has no politics. He considers himself a Liberal Unionist. Lady Bracknell finds his answer satisfactory because it means that he is a *Tory*, or a conservative. Jack's home in London is on the "unfashionable side" of Belgrave Square, so "that could easily be altered." When Jack inquires whether she means the "unfashionable" or the side of the street, Lady Bracknell explains, "Both, if necessary." The French Revolution is held up as an example of what happens when the lower class is taught to question its

betters. Education is not for learning to think; it is for mindlessly following convention. Lady Bracknell approves of ignorance. In fact, she explains, "The whole theory of modern education is radically unsound. Fortunately in England, at any rate, education produces no effect whatsoever. If it did, it would prove a serious danger to the upper classes, and probably lead to acts of violence in Grosvenor Square." Thinking causes discontent, and discontent leads to social revolution. That simply will not do.

Class Conflict

One might think aristocrats would see the error of their ways and try to be more virtuous in a moral sense. However, they see their attitudes as the virtuous high ground and believe that other classes should conform to aristocratic attitudes and see the error of their own ways. When Miss Prism seems to chide the lower classes for producing so many children for Chasuble to christen, she appears to see it as a question of thrift. "I have often spoken to the poorer classes on the subject [of christenings]. But they don't seem to know what thrift is." Chasuble speaks humorously of the penchant of the aristocracy to dabble in good causes that do not disrupt their own lives too much. He mentions a sermon he gave for the Society for the Prevention of Discontent Among the Upper Orders. To the Victorians, reform means keeping the current social and economic system in place by perpetuating upper-class virtues and economy.

Every page, every line of dialogue, every character, each symbol, and every stage direction in *The Importance of Being Earnest* is bent on supporting Wilde's contention that social change happens as a matter of thoughtfulness. Art can bring about such thoughtfulness. If the eccentric or unusual is to be replaced with correct behavior and thought, human sympathy and compassion suffer. If strict moral values leave no room for question, a society loses much of what is known as humanity.

Quiz

1. Algernon is suspicious of Jack's personal life because he finds a

    a. bill for a romantic dinner at Willis'.
    b. cigarette case with an inscription to Jack from an unknown woman.
    c. letter to Jack from someone named Cecily.
    d. woman's glove in Jack's carriage.

2. Both Algernon and Jack make an appointment with Dr. Chasuble to discuss

    a. being rechristened with new names.
    b. their marriages.
    c. their religious qualms.
    d. their wedding vows.

3. Cecily and Gwendolen's conflict over their engagements is explored during

    a. Mr. Gribsby's visit.
    b. Reverend Chasuble's sermon.
    c. tea time.
    d. the christening of Ernest.

4. Cecily explains to Algernon that an engagement, to be serious, must be

    a. approved by her guardian.
    b. backed up by ready cash.
    c. broken at least once.
    d. published in the London *Times*.

5. Jack makes up a story about his brother Ernest dying in

    a. Dublin.
    b. Geneva.
    c. London.

d. Paris.

6. Jack wins Lady Bracknell's blessing for his marriage to Gwendolen by

   a. giving her a detailed written list of his finances.
   b. offering to name their first daughter Augusta.
   c. revealing that he is a crown prince.
   d. threatening to remove his consent for Algernon's marriage to Cecily.

7. Lady Bracknell changes her mind about Cecily's suitability to marry Algernon when she learns of

   a. Algernon's latest escapade.
   b. Cecily's education.
   c. Cecily's fortune.
   d. Jack's birth.

8. The secret of Jack's birth and parentage is revealed through the past of

   a. Cecily.
   b. Gwendolen.
   c. Miss Prism.
   d. Reverend Chasuble.

9. Two areas in which Victorians showed little sympathy or compassion were

   a. childbirth and death.
   b. childhood and old age.
   c. illness and death.
   d. poverty and illness.

10. Who said the following: "I hope you have not been leading a double life, pretending to be wicked and being really good all the time."

    a. Cecily
    b. Gwendolen
    c. Lady Bracknell
    d. Reverend Chasuble

11. Who said the following: "Nothing annoys people so much as not receiving invitations."

    a. Lady Wilde
    b. Oscar Wilde
    c. Sir William Wilde
    d. Willie Wilde

12. Who said the following: "All women become like their mothers. That is their tragedy. No man does. That's his."

    a. Algernon
    b. Jack
    c. Miss Prism
    d. Reverend Chasuble

Death of A Salesman

Arthur Miller

ACT ONE

A melody is heard, played upon a flute. It is small and fine, telling of grass and trees and the horizon. The curtain rises.

Before us is the SALESMAN'S *house. We are aware of towering, angular shapes behind it, surrounding it on all sides. Only the blue light of the sky falls upon the house and forestage; the surrounding area shows an angry glow of orange. As more light appears, we see a solid vault of apartment houses around the small, fragile-seeming home. An air of the dream clings to the place, a dream rising out of reality. The kitchen at center seems actual enough, for there is a kitchen table with three chairs, and a refrigerator. But no other fixtures are seen. At the back of the kitchen there is a draped entrance, which leads to the living-room. To the right of the kitchen, on a level raised two feet, is a bedroom furnished only with a brass bedstead and a straight chair. On a shelf over the bed a silver athletic trophy stands. A window opens on to the apartment house at the side.*

Behind the kitchen, on a level raised six and a half feet, is the boys' bedroom, at present barely visible. Two beds are dimly seen, and at the back of the room a dormer window. (This bedroom is above the unseen living-room.) At the left a stairway curves up to it from the kitchen.

The entire setting is wholly or, in some places, partially transparent. The roof-line of the house is one-dimensional; under and over it we see the apartment buildings. Before the house lies an apron, curving beyond the forestage into the orchestra. This forward area serves as the back yard as well as the locale of all Willy's imaginings and of his city scenes. Whenever the action is in the present the actors observe the imaginary wall-lines, entering the house only through its door at the left. But in the scenes of the past these boundaries are broken, and characters enter or leave a room by stepping "through" a wall on to the forestage.

[*From the right,* WILLY LOMAN, *the Salesman, enters, carrying two large sample cases. The flute plays on. He hears but is not aware of it. He is past sixty years of age, dressed quietly. Even as he crosses the stage to the doorway of the house, his exhaustion is apparent. He unlocks*

the door, comes into the kitchen, and thankfully lets his burden down, feeling the soreness of his palms. A word-sigh escapes his lips—it might be "Oh, boy, oh, boy." *He closes the door, then carries his cases out into the living-room, through the draped kitchen doorway.* LINDA, *his wife, has stirred in her bed at the right. She gets out and puts on a robe, listening. Most often jovial, she has developed an iron repression of her exceptions to* WILLY'S *behavior—she more than loves him, she admires him, as though his mercurial nature, his temper, his massive dreams and little cruelties, served her only as sharp reminders of the turbulent longings within him, longings which she shares but lacks the temperament to utter and follow to their end.*]

LINDA [*hearing* WILLY *outside the bedroom, calls with some trepidation*]: Willy!

WILLY: It's all right. I came back.

LINDA: Why? What happened? [*Slight pause.*] Did something happen, Willy?

WILLY: No, nothing happened.

LINDA: You didn't smash the car, did you?

WILLY [*with casual irritation*]: I said nothing happened. Didn't you hear me?

LINDA: Don't you feel well?

WILLY: I'm tired to the death. [*The flute has faded away. He sits on the bed beside her, a little numb.*] I couldn't make it. I just couldn't make it, Linda.

LINDA [*very carefully, delicately*]: Where were you all day? You look terrible.

WILLY: I got as far as a little above Yonkers. I stopped for a cup of coffee. Maybe it was the coffee.

LINDA: What?

WILLY [*after a pause*]: I suddenly couldn't drive any more. The car kept going off on to the shoulder, y'know?

LINDA [*helpfully*]: Oh. Maybe it was the steering again. I don't think Angelo knows the Studebaker.

WILLY: No, it's me, it's me. Suddenly I realize I'm goin' sixty miles an hour and I don't remember the last five minutes. I'm—I can't seem to—keep my mind to it.

LINDA: Maybe it's your glasses. You never went for your new glasses.

WILLY: No, I see everything. I came back ten miles an hour. It took me nearly four hours from Yonkers.

LINDA [*resigned*]: Well, you'll just have to take a rest, Willy, you can't continue this way.

WILLY: I just got back from Florida.

LINDA: But you didn't rest your mind. Your mind is overactive, and the mind is what counts, dear.

WILLY: I'll start out in the morning. Maybe I'll feel better in the morning. [*She is taking off his shoes.*] These goddam arch supports are killing me.

LINDA: Take an aspirin. Should I get you an aspirin? It'll soothe you.

WILLY [*with wonder*]: I was driving along, you understand? And I was fine. I was even observing the scenery. You can imagine, me looking at scenery, on the road every week of my life. But it's so beautiful up there, Linda, the trees are so thick, and the sun is warm. I opened the windshield and just let the warm air bathe over me. And then all of a sudden I'm goin' off the road! I'm tellin' ya, I absolutely forgot I was driving. If I'd've gone the other way over the white line I might've killed somebody. So I went on again—and five minutes later I'm dreamin' again, and I nearly—[*He presses two fingers against his eyes.*] I have such thoughts, I have such strange thoughts.

LINDA: Willy, dear. Talk to them again. There's no reason why you can't work in New York.

WILLY: They don't need me in New York. I'm the New England man. I'm vital in New England.

LINDA: But you're sixty years old. They can't expect you to keep traveling every week.

WILLY: I'll have to send a wire to Portland. I'm supposed to see Brown and Morrison tomorrow morning at ten o'clock to show the line. Goddammit, I could sell them! [*He starts putting on his jacket.*]

LINDA [*taking the jacket from him*]: Why don't you go down to the place tomorrow and tell Howard you've simply got to work in New York? You're too accommodating, dear.

WILLY: If old man Wagner was alive I'd a been in charge of New York now! That man was a prince, he was a masterful man. But that boy of his, that Howard, he don't appreciate. When I went north the first time, the Wagner Company didn't know where New England was!

LINDA: Why don't you tell those things to Howard, dear?

WILLY [*encouraged*]: I will, I definitely will. Is there any cheese?

LINDA: I'll make you a sandwich.

WILLY: No, go to sleep. I'll take some milk. I'll be up right away. The boys in?

LINDA: They're sleeping. Happy took Biff on a date tonight.

WILLY [*interested*]: That so?

LINDA: It was so nice to see them shaving together, one behind the other, in the bathroom. And going out together. You notice? The whole house smells of shaving lotion.

WILLY: Figure it out. Work a lifetime to pay off a house. You finally own it, and there's nobody to live in it.

LINDA: Well, dear, life is a casting off. It's always that way.

WILLY: No, no, some people—some people accomplish something. Did Biff say anything after I went this morning?

LINDA: You shouldn't have criticized him, Willy, especially after he just got off the train. You mustn't lose your temper with him.

WILLY: When the hell did I lose my temper? I simply asked him if he was making any money. Is that a criticism?

LINDA: But, dear, how could he make any money?

WILLY [*worried and angered*]: There's such an undercurrent in him. He became a moody man. Did he apologize when I left this morning?

LINDA: He was crestfallen, Willy. You know how he admires you. I think if

he finds himself, then you'll both be happier and not fight any more.

WILLY: How can he find himself on a farm? Is that a life? A farmhand? In the beginning, when he was young, I thought, well, a young man, it's good for him to tramp around, take a lot of different jobs. But it's more than ten years now and he has yet to make thirty-five dollars a week!

LINDA: He's finding himself, Willy.

WILLY: Not finding yourself at the age of thirty-four is a disgrace!

LINDA: Shh!

WILLY: The trouble is he's lazy, goddammit!

LINDA: Willy, please!

WILLY: Biff is a lazy bum!

LINDA: They're sleeping. Get something to eat. Go on down.

WILLY: Why did he come home? I would like to know what brought him home.

LINDA: I don't know. I think he's still lost, Willy. I think he's very lost.

WILLY: Biff Loman is lost. In the greatest country in the world a young man with such—personal attractiveness, gets lost. And such a hard worker. There's one thing about Biff—he's not lazy.

LINDA: Never.

WILLY [*with pity and resolve*]: I'll see him in the morning; I'll have a nice talk with him. I'll get him a job selling. He could be big in no time. My God! Remember how they used to follow him around in high school? When he smiled at one of them their faces lit up. When he walked down the street . . . [*He loses himself in reminiscences.*]

LINDA [*trying to bring him out of it*]: Willy, dear, I got a new kind of American-type cheese today. It's whipped.

WILLY: Why do you get American when I like Swiss?

LINDA: I just thought you'd like a change—

WILLY: I don't want a change! I want Swiss cheese. Why am I always being contradicted?

LINDA [*with a covering laugh*]: I thought it would be a surprise.

WILLY: Why don't you open a window in here, for God's sake?

LINDA [*with infinite patience*]: They're all open, dear.

WILLY: The way they boxed us in here. Bricks and windows, windows and bricks.

LINDA: We should've bought the land next door.

WILLY: The street is lined with cars. There's not a breath of fresh air in the neighborhood. The grass don't grow any more, you can't raise a carrot in the back yard. They should've had a law against apartment houses. Remember those two beautiful elm trees out there? When I and Biff hung the swing between them?

LINDA: Yeah, like being a million miles from the city.

WILLY: They should've arrested the builder for cutting those down. They massacred the neighborhood. [*Lost*] More and more I think of those days, Linda. This time of year it was lilac and wisteria. And then the peonies would come out, and the daffodils. What fragrance in this room!

LINDA: Well, after all, people had to move somewhere.

WILLY: No, there's more people now.

LINDA: I don't think there's more people. I think—

WILLY: There's more people! That's what's ruining this country! Population is getting out of control. The competition is maddening! Smell the stink from that apartment house! And another one on the other side . . . How can they whip cheese?

[*On* WILLY'S *last line,* BIFF *and* HAPPY *raise themselves up in their beds, listening.*]

LINDA: Go down, try it. And be quiet.

WILLY [*turning to* LINDA, *guiltily*]: You're not worried about me, are you, sweetheart?

BIFF: What's the matter?

HAPPY: Listen!

LINDA: You've got too much on the ball to worry about.

WILLY: You're my foundation and my support, Linda.

LINDA: Just try to relax, dear. You make mountains out of molehills.

WILLY: I won't fight with him any more. If he wants to go back to Texas, let him go.

LINDA: He'll find his way.

WILLY: Sure. Certain men just don't get started till later in life. Like Thomas Edison, I think. Or B. F. Goodrich. One of them was deaf. [*He starts for the bedroom doorway.*] I'll put my money on Biff.

LINDA: And Willy—if it's warm Sunday we'll drive in the country. And we'll open the windshield, and take lunch.

WILLY: No, the windshields don't open on the new cars.

LINDA: But you opened it today.

WILLY: Me? I didn't. [*He stops.*] Now isn't that peculiar! Isn't that a remarkable—[*He breaks off in amazement and fright as the flute is heard distantly.*]

LINDA: What, darling?

WILLY: That is the most remarkable thing.

LINDA: What, dear?

WILLY: I was thinking of the Chevvy. [*Slight pause.*] Nineteen twenty-eight . . . when I had that red Chevvy—[*Breaks off.*] That funny? I coulda sworn I was driving that Chevvy today.

LINDA: Well, that's nothing. Something must've reminded you.

WILLY: Remarkable. Ts. Remember those days? The way Biff used to simonize that car? The dealer refused to believe there was eighty thousand miles on it. [*He shakes his head.*] Heh! [*To* LINDA] Close your eyes, I'll be right up. [*He walks out of the bedroom.*]

HAPPY [*to* BIFF]: Jesus, maybe he smashed up the car again!

LINDA [*calling after* WILLY]: Be careful on the stairs, dear! The cheese is on the middle shelf! [*She turns, goes over to the bed, takes his jacket, and goes*

out of the bedroom.]

[*Light has risen on the boys' room. Unseen,* WILLY *is heard talking to himself,* "Eighty thousand miles," *and a little laugh.* BIFF *gets out of bed, comes downstage a bit, and stands attentively.* BIFF *is two years older than his brother,* HAPPY, *well built, but in these days bears a worn air and seems less self-assured. He has succeeded less, and his dreams are stronger and less acceptable than* HAPPY'S. HAPPY *is tall, powerfully made. Sexuality is like a visible color on him, or a scent that many women have discovered. He, like his brother, is lost, but in a different way, for he has never allowed himself to turn his face toward defeat and is thus more confused and hard-skinned, although seemingly more content.*]

HAPPY [*getting out of bed*]: He's going to get his licence taken away if he keeps that up. I'm getting nervous about him, y'know, Biff ?

BIFF: His eyes are going.

HAPPY: No, I've driven with him. He sees all right. He just doesn't keep his mind on it. I drove into the city with him last week. He stops at a green light and then it turns red and he goes. [*He laughs.*]

BIFF: Maybe he's color-blind.

HAPPY: Pop? Why, he's got the finest eye for color in the business. You know that.

BIFF [*sitting down on his bed*]: I'm going to sleep.

HAPPY: You're not still sour on Dad, are you, Biff?

BIFF: He's all right, I guess.

WILLY [*underneath them, in the living-room*]: Yes, sir, eighty thousand miles —eighty-two thousand!

BIFF: You smoking?

HAPPY [*holding out a pack of cigarettes*]: Want one?

BIFF [*taking a cigarette*]: I can never sleep when I smell it.

WILLY: What a simonizing job, heh!

HAPPY [*with deep sentiment*]: Funny, Biff, y'know? Us sleeping in here

again? The old beds. [*He pats his bed affectionately.*] All the talk that went across those two beds, huh? Our whole lives.

BIFF: Yeah. Lotta dreams and plans.

HAPPY [*with a deep and masculine laugh*]: About five hundred women would like to know what was said in this room.

[*They share a soft laugh.*]

BIFF: Remember that big Betsy something—what the hell was her name—over on Bushwick Avenue?

HAPPY [*combing his hair*]: With the collie dog!

BIFF: That's the one. I got you in there, remember?

HAPPY: Yeah, that was my first time—I think. Boy, there was a pig! [*They laugh, almost crudely.*] You taught me everything I know about women. Don't forget that.

BIFF: I bet you forgot how bashful you used to be. Especially with girls.

HAPPY: Oh, I still am, Biff.

BIFF: Oh, go on.

HAPPY: I just control it, that's all. I think I got less bashful and you got more so. What happened, Biff? Where's the old humor, the old confidence? [*He shakes* BIFF'S *knee.* BIFF *gets up and moves restlessly about the room.*] What's the matter?

BIFF: Why does Dad mock me all the time?

HAPPY: He's not mocking you, he—

BIFF: Everything I say there's a twist of mockery on his face. I can't get near him.

HAPPY: He just wants you to make good, that's all. I wanted to talk to you about Dad for a long time, Biff. Something's—happening to him. He—talks to himself.

BIFF: I noticed that this morning. But he always mumbled.

HAPPY: But not so noticeable. It got so embarrassing I sent him to Florida. And you know something? Most of the time he's talking to you.

BIFF: What's he say about me?

HAPPY: I can't make it out.

BIFF: What's he say about me?

HAPPY: I think the fact that you're not settled, that you're still kind of up in the air . . .

BIFF: There's one or two other things depressing him, Happy.

HAPPY: What do you mean?

BIFF: Never mind. Just don't lay it all to me.

HAPPY: But I think if you got started—I mean—is there any future for you out there?

BIFF: I tell ya, Hap, I don't know what the future is. I don't know—what I'm supposed to want.

HAPPY: What do you mean?

BIFF: Well, I spent six or seven years after high school trying to work myself up. Shipping clerk, salesman, business of one kind or another. And it's a measly manner of existence. To get on that subway on the hot mornings in summer. To devote your whole life to keeping stock, or making phone calls, or selling or buying. To suffer fifty weeks of the year for the sake of a two-week vacation, when all you really desire is to be outdoors, with your shirt off. And always to have to get ahead of the next fella. And still—that's how you build a future.

HAPPY: Well, you really enjoy it on a farm? Are you content out there?

BIFF [*with rising agitation*]: Hap, I've had twenty or thirty different kinds of job since I left home before the war, and it always turns out the same. I just realized it lately. In Nebraska when I herded cattle, and the Dakotas, and Arizona, and now in Texas. It's why I came home now, I guess, because I realized it. This farm I work on, it's spring there now, see? And they've got about fifteen new colts. There's nothing more inspiring or—beautiful than the sight of a mare and a new colt. And it's cool there now, see? Texas is cool now, and it's spring. And whenever spring comes to where I am, I suddenly get the feeling, my God, I'm not gettin' anywhere! What the hell am I doing, playing around with horses, twenty-eight dollars a week! I'm thirty-four years old, I oughta be makin' my future. That's when I come running home. And now, I get

here, and I don't know what to do with myself. [*After a pause*] I've always made a point of not wasting my life, and everytime I come back here I know that all I've done is to waste my life.

HAPPY: You're a poet, you know that, Biff? You're a—you're an idealist!

BIFF: No, I'm mixed up very bad. Maybe I oughta get married. Maybe I oughta get stuck into something. Maybe that's my trouble. I'm like a boy. I'm not married, I'm not in business, I just—I'm like a boy. Are you content, Hap? You're a success, aren't you? Are you content?

HAPPY: Hell, no!

BIFF: Why? You're making money, aren't you?

HAPPY [*moving about with energy, expressiveness*]: All I can do now is wait for the merchandise manager to die. And suppose I get to be merchandise manager? He's a good friend of mine, and he just built a terrific estate on Long Island. And he lived there about two months and sold it, and now he's building another one. He can't enjoy it once it's finished. And I know that's just what I would do. I don't know what the hell I'm workin' for. Sometimes I sit in my apartment—all alone. And I think of the rent I'm paying. And it's crazy. But then, it's what I always wanted. My own apartment, a car, and plenty of women. And still, goddammit, I'm lonely.

BIFF [*with enthusiasm*]: Listen, why don't you come out West with me?

HAPPY: You and I, heh?

BIFF: Sure, maybe we could buy a ranch. Raise cattle, use our muscles. Men built like we are should be working out in the open.

HAPPY [*avidly*]: The Loman Brothers, heh?

BIFF [*with vast affection*]: Sure, we'd be known all over the counties!

HAPPY [*enthralled*]: That's what I dream about, Biff. Sometimes I want to just rip my clothes off in the middle of the store and outbox that goddam merchandise manager. I mean I can outbox, outrun, and outlift anybody in that store, and I have to take orders from those common, petty sons-of-bitches till I can't stand it any more.

BIFF: I'm tellin' you, kid, if you were with me I'd be happy out there.

HAPPY [*enthused*]: See, Biff, everybody around me is so false that I'm

constantly lowering my ideals . . .

BIFF: Baby, together we'd stand up for one another, we'd have someone to trust.

HAPPY: If I were around you—

BIFF: Hap, the trouble is we weren't brought up to grub for money. I don't know how to do it.

HAPPY: Neither can I!

BIFF: Then let's go!

HAPPY: The only thing is—what can you make out there?

BIFF: But look at your friend. Builds an estate and then hasn't the peace of mind to live in it.

HAPPY: Yeah, but when he walks into the store the waves part in front of him. That's fifty-two thousand dollars a year coming through the revolving door, and I got more in my pinky finger than he's got in his head.

BIFF: Yeah, but you just said—

HAPPY: I gotta show some of those pompous, self-important executives over there that Hap Loman can make the grade. I want to walk into the store the way he walks in. Then I'll go with you, Biff. We'll be together yet, I swear. But take those two we had tonight. Now weren't they gorgeous creatures?

BIFF: Yeah, yeah, most gorgeous I've had in years.

HAPPY: I get that any time I want, Biff. Whenever I feel disgusted. The only trouble is, it gets like bowling or something. I just keep knockin' them over and it doesn't mean anything. You still run around a lot?

BIFF: Naa. I'd like to find a girl—steady, somebody with substance.

HAPPY: That's what I long for.

BIFF: Go on! You'd never come home.

HAPPY: I would! Somebody with character, with resistance! Like Mom, y'know? You're gonna call me a bastard when I tell you this. That girl Charlotte I was with tonight is engaged to be married in five weeks. [*He tries on his new hat.*]

BIFF: No kiddin'!

HAPPY: Sure, the guy's in line for the vice-presidency of the store. I don't know what gets into me, maybe I just have an overdeveloped sense of competition or something, but I went and ruined her, and furthermore I can't get rid of her. And he's the third executive I've done that to. Isn't that a crummy characteristic? And to top it all, I go to their weddings! [*Indignantly, but laughing*] Like I'm not supposed to take bribes. Manufacturers offer me a hundred-dollar bill now and then to throw an order their way. You know how honest I am, but it's like this girl, see. I hate myself for it. Because I don't want the girl, and, still, I take it and—I love it!

BIFF: Let's go to sleep.

HAPPY: I guess we didn't settle anything, heh?

BIFF: I just got one idea that I think I'm going to try.

HAPPY: What's that?

BIFF: Remember Bill Oliver?

HAPPY: Sure, Oliver is very big now. You want to work for him again?

BIFF: No, but when I quit he said something to me. He put his arm on my shoulder, and he said, "Biff, if you ever need anything, come to me."

HAPPY: I remember that. That sounds good.

BIFF: I think I'll go to see him. If I could get ten thousand or even seven or eight thousand dollars I could buy a beautiful ranch.

HAPPY: I bet he'd back you. 'Cause he thought highly of you, Biff. I mean, they all do. You're well liked, Biff. That's why I say to come back here, and we both have the apartment. And I'm tellin' you, Biff, any babe you want . . .

BIFF: No, with a ranch I could do the work I like and still be something. I just wonder though. I wonder if Oliver still thinks I stole that carton of basketballs.

HAPPY: Oh, he probably forgot that long ago. It's almost ten years. You're too sensitive. Anyway, he didn't really fire you.

BIFF: Well, I think he was going to. I think that's why I quit. I was never sure whether he knew or not. I know he thought the world of me, though. I was the only one he'd let lock up the place.

WILLY [*below*]: You gonna wash the engine, Biff?

HAPPY: Shh!

[BIFF *looks at* HAPPY, *who is gazing down, listening.* WILLY *is mumbling in the parlor.*]

HAPPY: You hear that?

[*They listen.* WILLY *laughs warmly.*]

BIFF [*growing angry*]: Doesn't he know Mom can hear that?

WILLY: Don't get your sweater dirty, Biff!

[*A look of pain crosses* BIFF'S *face.*]

HAPPY: Isn't that terrible? Don't leave again, will you? You'll find a job here. You gotta stick around. I don't know what to do about him, it's getting embarrassing.

WILLY: What a simonizing job!

BIFF: Mom's hearing that!

WILLY: No kiddin', Biff, you got a date? Wonderful!

HAPPY: Go on to sleep. But talk to him in the morning, will you?

BIFF [*reluctantly getting into bed*]: With her in the house. Brother!

HAPPY [*getting into bed*]: I wish you'd have a good talk with him.

[*The light on their room begins to fade.*]

BIFF [*to himself in bed*]: That selfish, stupid . . .

HAPPY: Sh . . . Sleep, Biff.

[*Their light is out. Well before they have finished speaking,* WILLY'S *form is dimly seen below in the darkened kitchen. He opens the refrigerator, searches in there, and takes out a bottle of milk. The apartment houses are fading out, and the entire house and surroundings become covered with leaves. Music insinuates itself as the leaves appear.*]

WILLY: Just wanna be careful with those girls, Biff, that's all. Don't make any promises. No promises of any kind. Because a girl, y'know, they always

believe what you tell 'em, and you're very young. Biff, you're too young to be talking seriously to girls.

[*Light rises on the kitchen.* WILLY, *talking, shuts the refrigerator door and comes downstage to the kitchen table. He pours milk into a glass. He is totally immersed in himself, smiling faintly.*]

WILLY: Too young entirely, Biff. You want to watch your schooling first. Then when you're all set, there'll be plenty of girls for a boy like you. [*He smiles broadly at a kitchen chair.*] That so? The girls pay for you? [*He laughs.*] Boy, you must really be makin' a hit.

[WILLY *is gradually addressing—physically—a point offstage, speaking through the wall of the kitchen, and his voice has been rising in volume to that of a normal conversation.*]

WILLY: I been wondering why you polish the car so careful. Ha! Don't leave the hubcaps, boys. Get the chamois to the hubcaps. Happy, use newspaper on the windows, it's the easiest thing. Show him how to do it, Biff! You see, Happy? Pad it up, use it like a pad. That's it, that's it, good work. You're doin' all right, Hap. [*He pauses, then nods in approbation for a few seconds, then looks upward.*] Biff, first thing we gotta do when we get time is clip that big branch over the house. Afraid it's gonna fall in a storm and hit the roof. Tell you what. We get a rope and sling her around, and then we climb up there with a couple of saws and take her down. Soon as you finish the car, boys, I wanna see ya. I got a surprise for you, boys.

BIFF [*offstage*]: Whatta ya got, Dad?

WILLY: No, you finish first. Never leave a job till you're finished—remember that. [*Looking toward the "big trees"*] Biff, up in Albany I saw a beautiful hammock. I think I'll buy it next trip, and we'll hang it right between those two elms. Wouldn't that be something? Just swingin' there under those branches. Boy, that would be . . .

[YOUNG BIFF *and* YOUNG HAPPY *appear from the direction* WILLY *was addressing.* HAPPY *carries rags and a pail of water.* BIFF, *wearing a sweater with a block "S," carries a football.*]

BIFF [*pointing in the direction of the car offstage*]: How's that, Pop, professional?

WILLY: Terrific. Terrific job, boys. Good work, Biff.

HAPPY: Where's the surprise, Pop?

WILLY: In the back seat of the car.

HAPPY: Boy! [*He runs off.*]

BIFF: What is it, Dad? Tell me, what'd you buy?

WILLY [*laughing, cuffs him*]: Never mind, something I want you to have.

BIFF [*turns and starts off*]: What is it, Hap?

HAPPY [*offstage*]: It's a punching bag!

BIFF: Oh, Pop!

WILLY: It's got Gene Tunney's signature on it!

[HAPPY *runs onstage with a punching bag.*]

BIFF: Gee, how'd you know we wanted a punching bag?

WILLY: Well, it's the finest thing for the timing.

HAPPY [*lies down on his back and pedals with his feet*]: I'm losing weight, you notice, Pop?

WILLY [*to* HAPPY]: Jumping rope is good too.

BIFF: Did you see the new football I got?

WILLY [*examining the ball*]: Where'd you get a new ball?

BIFF: The coach told me to practice my passing.

WILLY: That so? And he gave you the ball, heh?

BIFF: Well, I borrowed it from the locker room. [*He laughs confidentially.*]

WILLY [*laughing with him at the theft*]: I want you to return that.

HAPPY: I told you he wouldn't like it!

BIFF [*angrily*]: Well, I'm bringing it back!

WILLY [*stopping the incipient argument, to* HAPPY]: Sure, he's gotta practice with a regulation ball, doesn't he? [*To* BIFF] Coach'll probably congratulate you on your initiative!

BIFF: Oh, he keeps congratulating my initiative all the time, Pop.

WILLY: That's because he likes you. If somebody else took that ball there'd be an uproar. So what's the report, boys, what's the report?

BIFF: Where'd you go this time, Dad? Gee, we were lonesome for you.

WILLY [*pleased, puts an arm around each boy and they come down to the apron*]: Lonesome, heh?

BIFF: Missed you every minute.

WILLY: Don't say? Tell you a secret, boys. Don't breathe it to a soul. Someday I'll have my own business, and I'll never have to leave home any more.

HAPPY: Like Uncle Charley, heh?

WILLY: Bigger than Uncle Charley! Because Charley is not—liked. He's liked, but he's not—well liked.

BIFF: Where'd you go this time, Dad?

WILLY: Well, I got on the road, and I went north to Providence. Met the Mayor.

BIFF: The Mayor of Providence!

WILLY: He was sitting in the hotel lobby.

BIFF: What'd he say?

WILLY: He said, "Morning!" And I said, "You got a fine city here, Mayor." And then he had coffee with me. And then I went to Waterbury. Waterbury is a fine city. Big clock city, the famous Waterbury clock. Sold a nice bill there. And then Boston—Boston is the cradle of the Revolution. A fine city. And a couple of other towns in Mass., and on to Portland and Bangor and straight home!

BIFF: Gee, I'd love to go with you sometime, Dad.

WILLY: Soon as summer comes.

HAPPY: Promise?

WILLY: You and Hap and I, and I'll show you all the towns. America is full of beautiful towns and fine, upstanding people. And they know me, boys, they know me up and down New England. The finest people. And when I bring you

fellas up, there'll be open sesame for all of us, 'cause one thing, boys: I have friends. I can park my car in any street in New England, and the cops protect it like their own. This summer, heh?

BIFF and HAPPY [*together*]: Yeah! You bet!

WILLY: We'll take our bathing suits.

HAPPY: We'll carry your bags, Pop!

WILLY: Oh, won't that be something! Me comin' into the Boston stores with you boys carryin' my bags. What a sensation!

[BIFF *is prancing around, practicing passing the ball.*]

WILLY: You nervous, Biff, about the game?

BIFF: Not if you're gonna be there.

WILLY: What do they say about you in school, now that they made you captain?

HAPPY: There's a crowd of girls behind him every time the classes change.

BIFF [*taking* WILLY'S *hand*]: This Saturday, Pop, this Saturday—just for you, I'm going to break through for a touchdown.

HAPPY: You're supposed to pass.

BIFF: I'm takin' one play for Pop. You watch me, Pop, and when I take off my helmet, that means I'm breakin' out. Then you watch me crash through that line!

WILLY [*kisses* BIFF]: Oh, wait'll I tell this in Boston!

[BERNARD *enters in knickers. He is younger than* BIFF, *earnest and loyal, a worried boy.*]

BERNARD: Biff, where are you? You're supposed to study with me today.

WILLY: Hey, looka Bernard. What're you lookin' so anemic about, Bernard?

BERNARD: He's gotta study, Uncle Willy. He's got Regents next week.

HAPPY [*tauntingly, spinning* BERNARD *around*]: Let's box, Bernard!

BERNARD: Biff ! [*He gets away from* HAPPY.] Listen, Biff, I heard Mr. Birnbaum say that if you don't start studyin' math he's gonna flunk you, and you

won't graduate. I heard him!

WILLY: You better study with him, Biff. Go ahead now.

BERNARD: I heard him!

BIFF: Oh, Pop, you didn't see my sneakers! [*He holds up a foot for* WILLY *to look at.*]

WILLY: Hey, that's a beautiful job of printing!

BERNARD [*wiping his glasses*]: Just because he printed University of Virginia on his sneakers doesn't mean they've got to graduate him, Uncle Willy!

WILLY [*angrily*]: What're you talking about? With scholarships to three universities they're gonna flunk him?

BERNARD: But I heard Mr. Birnbaum say—

WILLY: Don't be a pest, Bernard! [*To his boys*] What an anemic!

BERNARD: Okay, I'm waiting for you in my house, Biff.

[BERNARD *goes off. The* LOMANS *laugh.*]

WILLY: Bernard is not well liked, is he?

BIFF: He's liked, but he's not well liked.

HAPPY: That's right, Pop.

WILLY: That's just what I mean, Bernard can get the best marks in school, y'understand, but when he gets out in the business world, y'understand, you are going to be five times ahead of him. That's why I thank Almighty God you're both built like Adonises. Because the man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets ahead. Be liked and you will never want. You take me, for instance. I never have to wait in line to see a buyer. "Willy Loman is here!" That's all they have to know, and I go right through.

BIFF: Did you knock them dead, Pop?

WILLY: Knocked 'em cold in Providence, slaughtered 'em in Boston.

HAPPY [*on his back, pedaling again*]: I'm losing weight, you notice, Pop?

[LINDA *enters, as of old, a ribbon in her hair, carrying a basket of washing.*]

LINDA [*with youthful energy*]: Hello, dear!

WILLY: Sweetheart!

LINDA: How'd the Chevvy run?

WILLY: Chevrolet, Linda, is the greatest car ever built. [*To the boys*] Since when do you let your mother carry wash up the stairs?

BIFF: Grab hold there, boy!

HAPPY: Where to, Mom?

LINDA: Hang them up on the line. And you better go down to your friends, Biff. The cellar is full of boys. They don't know what to do with themselves.

BIFF: Ah, when Pop comes home they can wait!

WILLY [*laughs appreciatively*]: You better go down and tell them what to do, Biff.

BIFF: I think I'll have them sweep out the furnace room.

WILLY: Good work, Biff.

BIFF [*goes through wall-line of kitchen to doorway at back and calls down*]: Fellas! Everybody sweep out the furnace room! I'll be right down!

VOICES: All right! Okay, Biff.

BIFF: George and Sam and Frank, come out back! We're hangin' up the wash! Come on, Hap, on the double! [*He and* HAPPY *carry out the basket.*]

LINDA: The way they obey him!

WILLY: Well, that's training, the training. I'm tellin' you, I was sellin' thousands and thousands, but I had to come home.

LINDA: Oh, the whole block'll be at that game. Did you sell anything?

WILLY: I did five hundred gross in Providence and seven hundred gross in Boston.

LINDA: No! Wait a minute, I've got a pencil. [*She pulls pencil and paper out of her apron pocket.*] That makes your commission . . . Two hundred—my God! Two hundred and twelve dollars!

WILLY: Well, I didn't figure it yet, but . . .

LINDA: How much did you do?

WILLY: Well, I—I did—about a hundred and eighty gross in Providence. Well, no—it came to—roughly two hundred gross on the whole trip.

LINDA [*without hesitation*]: Two hundred gross. That's . . . [*She figures.*]

WILLY: The trouble was that three of the stores were half closed for inventory in Boston. Otherwise I woulda broke records.

LINDA: Well, it makes seventy dollars and some pennies. That's very good.

WILLY: What do we owe?

LINDA: Well, on the first there's sixteen dollars on the refrigerator—

WILLY: Why sixteen?

LINDA: Well, the fan belt broke, so it was a dollar eighty.

WILLY: But it's brand new.

LINDA: Well, the man said that's the way it is. Till they work themselves in, y'know.

[*They move through the wall-line into the kitchen.*]

WILLY: I hope we didn't get stuck on that machine.

LINDA: They got the biggest ads of any of them!

WILLY: I know, it's a fine machine. What else?

LINDA: Well, there's nine-sixty for the washing machine. And for the vacuum cleaner there's three and a half due on the fifteenth. Then the roof, you got twenty-one dollars remaining.

WILLY: It don't leak, does it?

LINDA: No, they did a wonderful job. Then you owe Frank for the carburetor.

WILLY: I'm not going to pay that man! That goddam Chevrolet, they ought to prohibit the manufacture of that car!

LINDA: Well, you owe him three and a half. And odds and ends, comes to around a hundred and twenty dollars by the fifteenth.

WILLY: A hundred and twenty dollars! My God, if business don't pick up I don't know what I'm gonna do!

LINDA: Well, next week you'll do better.

WILLY: Oh, I'll knock 'em dead next week. I'll go to Hartford. I'm very well liked in Hartford. You know, the trouble is, Linda, people don't seem to take to me.

[*They move onto the forestage.*]

LINDA: Oh, don't be foolish.

WILLY: I know it when I walk in. They seem to laugh at me.

LINDA: Why? Why would they laugh at you? Don't talk that way, Willy.

[WILLY *moves to the edge of the stage.* LINDA *goes into the kitchen and starts to darn stockings.*]

WILLY: I don't know the reason for it, but they just pass me by. I'm not noticed.

LINDA: But you're doing wonderful, dear. You're making seventy to a hundred dollars a week.

WILLY: But I gotta be at it ten, twelve hours a day. Other men—I don't know —they do it easier. I don't know why —I can't stop myself—I talk too much. A man oughta come in with a few words. One thing about Charley. He's a man of few words, and they respect him.

LINDA: You don't talk too much, you're just lively.

WILLY [*smiling*]: Well, I figure, what the hell, life is short, a couple of jokes. [*To himself*] I joke too much! [*The smile goes.*]

LINDA: Why? You're—

WILLY: I'm fat. I'm very—foolish to look at, Linda. I didn't tell you, but Christmas time I happened to be calling on F. H. Stewarts, and a salesman I know, as I was going in to see the buyer I heard him say something about—walrus. And I—I cracked him right across the face. I won't take that. I simply will not take that. But they do laugh at me. I know that.

LINDA: Darling . . .

WILLY: I gotta overcome it. I know I gotta overcome it. I'm not dressing to advantage, maybe.

LINDA: Willy, darling, you're the handsomest man in the world—

WILLY: Oh, no, Linda.

LINDA: To me you are. [*Slight pause.*] The handsomest.

[*From the darkness is heard the laughter of a woman.* WILLY *doesn't turn to it, but it continues through* LINDA'S *lines.*]

LINDA: And the boys, Willy. Few men are idolized by their children the way you are.

[*Music is heard as behind a scrim, to the left of the house,*

THE WOMAN, *dimly seen, is dressing.*]

WILLY [*with great feeling*]: You're the best there is, Linda, you're a pal, you know that? On the road—on the road I want to grab you sometimes and just kiss the life outa you.

[*The laughter is loud now, and he moves into a brightening area at the left, where* THE WOMAN *has come from behind the scrim and is standing, putting on her hat, looking into a "mirror," and laughing.*]

WILLY: 'Cause I get so lonely—especially when business is bad and there's nobody to talk to. I get the feeling that I'll never sell anything again, that I won't make a living for you, or a business, a business for the boys. [*He talks through* THE WOMAN'S *subsiding laughter;* THE WOMAN *primps at the "mirror."*] There's so much I want to make for—

THE WOMAN: Me? You didn't make me, Willy. I picked you.

WILLY [*pleased*]: You picked me?

THE WOMAN [*who is quite proper-looking, Willy's age*]: I did. I've been sitting at that desk watching all the salesmen go by, day in, day out. But you've got such a sense of humor, and we do have such a good time together, don't we?

WILLY: Sure, sure. [*He takes her in his arms.*] Why do you have to go now?

THE WOMAN: It's two o'clock . . .

WILLY: No, come on in! [*He pulls her.*]

THE WOMAN: . . . my sisters'll be scandalized. When'll you be back?

WILLY: Oh, two weeks about. Will you come up again?

THE WOMAN: Sure thing. You do make me laugh. It's good for me. [*She squeezes his arm, kisses him.*] And I think you're a wonderful man.

WILLY: You picked me, heh?

THE WOMAN: Sure. Because you're so sweet. And such a kidder.

WILLY: Well, I'll see you next time I'm in Boston.

THE WOMAN: I'll put you right through to the buyers.

WILLY [*slapping her bottom*]: Right. Well, bottoms up!

THE WOMAN [*slaps him gently and laughs*]: You just kill me, Willy. [*He suddenly grabs her and kisses her roughly.*] You kill me. And thanks for the stockings. I love a lot of stockings. Well, good night.

WILLY: Good night. And keep your pores open!

THE WOMAN: Oh, Willy!

[THE WOMAN *bursts out laughing, and* LINDA'S *laughter blends in.* THE WOMAN *disappears into the dark. Now the area at the kitchen table brightens.* LINDA *is sitting where she was at the kitchen table, but now is mending a pair of her silk stockings.*]

LINDA: You are, Willy. The handsomest man. You've got no reason to feel that—

WILLY [*coming out of* THE WOMAN'S *dimming area and going over to* LINDA]: I'll make it all up to you, Linda, I'll—

LINDA: There's nothing to make up, dear. You're doing fine, better than—

WILLY [*noticing her mending*]: What's that?

LINDA: Just mending my stockings. They're so expensive—

WILLY [*angrily, taking them from her*]: I won't have you mending stockings in this house! Now throw them out!

[LINDA *puts the stockings in her pocket.*]

BERNARD [*entering on the run*]: Where is he? If he doesn't study!

WILLY [*moving to the forestage, with great agitation*]: You'll give him the answers!

BERNARD: I do, but I can't on a Regents! That's a state exam! They're liable to arrest me!

WILLY: Where is he? I'll whip him, I'll whip him!

LINDA: And he'd better give back that football, Willy, it's not nice.

WILLY: Biff! Where is he? Why is he taking everything?

LINDA: He's too rough with the girls, Willy. All the mothers are afraid of him!

WILLY: I'll whip him!

BERNARD: He's driving the car without a license!

[THE WOMAN'S *laugh is heard.*]

WILLY: Shut up!

LINDA: All the mothers—

WILLY: Shut up!

BERNARD [*backing quietly away and out*]: Mr. Birnbaum says he's stuck up.

WILLY: Get outa here!

BERNARD: If he doesn't buckle down he'll flunk math! [*He goes off.*]

LINDA: He's right, Willy, you've gotta—

WILLY [*exploding at her*]: There's nothing the matter with him! You want him to be a worm like Bernard? He's got spirit, personality . . .

> [*As he speaks,* LINDA, *almost in tears, exits into the living-room.* WILLY *is alone in the kitchen, wilting and staring. The leaves are gone. It is night again, and the apartment houses look down from behind.*]

WILLY: Loaded with it. Loaded! What is he stealing? He's giving it back, isn't he? Why is he stealing? What did I tell him? I never in my life told him anything but decent things.

> [HAPPY *in pajamas has come down the stairs;* WILLY *suddenly becomes aware of* HAPPY'S *presence.*]

HAPPY: Let's go now, come on.

WILLY [*sitting down at the kitchen table*]: Huh! Why did she have to wax the

floors herself? Everytime she waxes the floors she keels over. She knows that!

HAPPY: Shh! Take it easy. What brought you back tonight?

WILLY: I got an awful scare. Nearly hit a kid in Yonkers. God! Why didn't I go to Alaska with my brother Ben that time! Ben! That man was a genius, that man was success incarnate! What a mistake! He begged me to go.

HAPPY: Well, there's no use in—

WILLY: You guys! There was a man started with the clothes on his back and ended up with diamond mines?

HAPPY: Boy, someday I'd like to know how he did it.

WILLY: What's the mystery? The man knew what he wanted and went out and got it! Walked into a jungle, and comes out, the age of twenty-one, and he's rich! The world is an oyster, but you don't crack it open on a mattress!

HAPPY: Pop, I told you I'm gonna retire you for life.

WILLY: You'll retire me for life on seventy goddam dollars a week? And your women and your car and your apartment, and you'll retire me for life! Christ's sake, I couldn't get past Yonkers today! Where are you guys, where are you? The woods are burning! I can't drive a car!

[CHARLEY *has appeared in the doorway. He is a large man, slow of speech, laconic, immovable. In all he says, despite what he says, there is pity, and, now, trepidation. He has a robe over pajamas, slippers on his feet. He enters the kitchen.*]

CHARLEY: Everything all right?

HAPPY: Yeah, Charley, everything's . . .

WILLY: What's the matter?

CHARLEY: I heard some noise. I thought something happened. Can't we do something about the walls? You sneeze in here, and in my house hats blow off.

HAPPY: Let's go to bed, Dad. Come on.

[CHARLEY *signals to* HAPPY *to go.*]

WILLY: You go ahead, I'm not tired at the moment.

HAPPY [*to* WILLY]: Take it easy, huh? [*He exits.*]

WILLY: What're you doin' up?

CHARLEY [*sitting down at the kitchen table opposite* WILLY]: Couldn't sleep good. I had a heartburn.

WILLY: Well, you don't know how to eat.

CHARLEY: I eat with my mouth.

WILLY: No, you're ignorant. You gotta know about vitamins and things like that.

CHARLEY: Come on, let's shoot. Tire you out a little.

WILLY [*hesitantly*]: All right. You got cards?

CHARLEY [*taking a deck from his pocket*]: Yeah, I got them. Someplace. What is it with those vitamins?

WILLY [*dealing*]: They build up your bones. Chemistry.

CHARLEY: Yeah, but there's no bones in a heartburn.

WILLY: What are you talkin' about? Do you know the first thing about it?

CHARLEY: Don't get insulted.

WILLY: Don't talk about something you don't know anything about.

[*They are playing. Pause.*]

CHARLEY: What're you doin' home?

WILLY: A little trouble with the car.

CHARLEY: Oh. [*Pause.*] I'd like to take a trip to California.

WILLY: Don't say.

CHARLEY: You want a job?

WILLY: I got a job, I told you that. [*After a slight pause*] What the hell are you offering me a job for?

CHARLEY: Don't get insulted.

WILLY: Don't insult me.

CHARLEY: I don't see no sense in it. You don't have to go on this way.

WILLY: I got a good job. [*Slight pause.*] What do you keep comin' in here for?

CHARLEY: You want me to go?

WILLY [*after a pause, withering*]: I can't understand it. He's going back to Texas again. What the hell is that?

CHARLEY: Let him go.

WILLY: I got nothin' to give him, Charley, I'm clean, I'm clean.

CHARLEY: He won't starve. None a them starve. Forget about him.

WILLY: Then what have I got to remember?

CHARLEY: You take it too hard. To hell with it. When a deposit bottle is broken you don't get your nickel back.

WILLY: That's easy enough for you to say.

CHARLEY: That ain't easy for me to say.

WILLY: Did you see the ceiling I put up in the living-room?

CHARLEY: Yeah, that's a piece of work. To put up a ceiling is a mystery to me. How do you do it?

WILLY: What's the difference?

CHARLEY: Well, talk about it.

WILLY: You gonna put up a ceiling?

CHARLEY: How could I put up a ceiling?

WILLY: Then what the hell are you bothering me for?

CHARLEY: You're insulted again.

WILLY: A man who can't handle tools is not a man. You're disgusting.

CHARLEY: Don't call me disgusting, Willy. [UNCLE BEN, *carrying a valise and an umbrella, enters the forestage from around the right corner of the house. He is a stolid man, in his sixties, with a mustache and an authoritative air. He is utterly certain of his destiny, and there is an aura of far places about him. He enters exactly as* WILLY *speaks.*]

WILLY: I'm getting awfully tired, Ben.

[BEN'S *music is heard.* BEN *looks around at everything.*]

CHARLEY: Good, keep playing; you'll sleep better. Did you call me Ben?

[BEN *looks at his watch.*]

WILLY: That's funny. For a second there you reminded me of my brother Ben.

BEN: I only have a few minutes. [*He strolls, inspecting the place.* WILLY *and* CHARLEY *continue playing.*]

CHARLEY: You never heard from him again, heh? Since that time?

WILLY: Didn't Linda tell you? Couple of weeks ago we got a letter from his wife in Africa. He died.

CHARLEY: That so.

BEN [*chuckling*]: So this is Brooklyn, eh?

CHARLEY: Maybe you're in for some of his money.

WILLY: Naa, he had seven sons. There's just one opportunity I had with that man . . .

BEN: I must make a train, William. There are several properties I'm looking at in Alaska.

WILLY: Sure, sure! If I'd gone with him to Alaska that time, everything would've been totally different.

CHARLEY: Go on, you'd froze to death up there.

WILLY: What're you talking about?

BEN: Opportunity is tremendous in Alaska, William. Surprised you're not up there.

WILLY: Sure, tremendous.

CHARLEY: Heh?

WILLY: There was the only man I ever met who knew the answers.

CHARLEY: Who?

BEN: How are you all?

WILLY [*taking a pot, smiling*]: Fine, fine.

CHARLEY: Pretty sharp tonight.

BEN: Is Mother living with you?

WILLY: No, she died a long time ago.

CHARLEY: Who?

BEN: That's too bad. Fine specimen of a lady, Mother.

WILLY [*to* CHARLEY]: Heh?

BEN: I'd hoped to see the old girl.

CHARLEY: Who died?

BEN: Heard anything from Father, have you?

WILLY [*unnerved*]: What do you mean, who died?

CHARLEY [*taking a pot*]: What're you talkin' about?

BEN [*looking at his watch*]: William, it's half past eight!

WILLY [*as though to dispel his confusion he angrily stops* CHARLEY'S *hand*]: That's my build!

CHARLEY: I put the ace—

WILLY: If you don't know how to play the game I'm not gonna throw my money away on you!

CHARLEY [*rising*]: It was my ace, for God's sake!

WILLY: I'm through, I'm through!

BEN: When did Mother die?

WILLY: Long ago. Since the beginning you never knew how to play cards.

CHARLEY [*picks up the cards and goes to the door*]: All right! Next time I'll bring a deck with five aces.

WILLY: I don't play that kind of game!

CHARLEY [*turning to him*]: You ought to be ashamed of yourself!

WILLY: Yeah?

CHARLEY: Yeah! [*He goes out.*]

WILLY [*slamming the door after him*]: Ignoramus!

BEN [*as* WILLY *comes toward him through the wall-line of the kitchen*]: So you're William.

WILLY [*shaking* BEN'S *hand*]: Ben! I've been waiting for you so long! What's the answer? How did you do it?

BEN: Oh, there's a story in that.

[LINDA *enters the forestage, as of old, carrying the wash basket.*]

LINDA: Is this Ben?

BEN [*gallantly*]: How do you do, my dear.

LINDA: Where've you been all these years? Willy's always wondered why you—

WILLY [*pulling* BEN *away from her impatiently*]: Where is Dad? Didn't you follow him? How did you get started?

BEN: Well, I don't know how much you remember.

WILLY: Well, I was just a baby, of course, only three or four years old—

BEN: Three years and eleven months.

WILLY: What a memory, Ben!

BEN: I have many enterprises, William, and I have never kept books.

WILLY: I remember I was sitting under the wagon in—was it Nebraska?

BEN: It was South Dakota, and I gave you a bunch of wildflowers.

WILLY: I remember you walking away down some open road.

BEN [*laughing*]: I was going to find Father in Alaska.

WILLY: Where is he?

BEN: At that age I had a very faulty view of geography, William. I discovered after a few days that I was heading due south, so instead of Alaska, I ended up in Africa.

LINDA: Africa!

WILLY: The Gold Coast!

BEN: Principally diamond mines.

LINDA: Diamond mines!

BEN: Yes, my dear. But I've only a few minutes—

WILLY: No! Boys! Boys! [YOUNG BIFF *and* HAPPY *appear.*] Listen to this. This is your Uncle Ben, a great man! Tell my boys, Ben!

BEN: Why boys, when I was seventeen I walked into the jungle, and when I was twenty-one I walked out. [*He laughs.*] And by God I was rich.

WILLY [*to the boys*]: You see what I been talking about? The greatest things can happen!

BEN [*glancing at his watch*]: I have an appointment in Ketchikan Tuesday week.

WILLY: No, Ben! Please tell about Dad. I want my boys to hear. I want them to know the kind of stock they spring from. All I remember is a man with a big beard, and I was in Mamma's lap, sitting around a fire, and some kind of high music.

BEN: His flute. He played the flute.

WILLY: Sure, the flute, that's right!

[*New music is heard, a high, rollicking tune.*]

BEN: Father was a very great and a very wild-hearted man. We would start in Boston, and he'd toss the whole family into the wagon, and then he'd drive the team right across the country; through Ohio, and Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, and all the Western states. And we'd stop in the towns and sell the flutes that he'd made on the way. Great inventor, Father. With one gadget he made more in a week than a man like you could make in a lifetime.

WILLY: That's just the way I'm bringing them up, Ben—rugged, well liked, all-around.

BEN: Yeah? [*To* BIFF] Hit that, boy—hard as you can. [*He pounds his stomach.*]

BIFF: Oh, no, sir!

BEN [*taking boxing stance*]: Come on, get to me! [*He laughs.*]

WILLY: Go to it, Biff! Go ahead, show him!

BIFF: Okay! [*He cocks his fists and starts in.*]

LINDA [*to* WILLY]: Why must he fight, dear?

BEN [*sparring with* BIFF]: Good boy! Good boy!

WILLY: How's that, Ben, heh?

HAPPY: Give him the left, Biff!

LINDA: Why are you fighting?

BEN: Good boy! [*Suddenly comes in, trips* BIFF, *and stands over him, the point of his umbrella poised over* BIFF'S *eye.*]

LINDA: Look out, Biff!

BIFF: Gee!

BEN [*patting* BIFF'S *knee*]: Never fight fair with a stranger, boy. You'll never get out of the jungle that way. [*Taking* LINDA'S *hand and bowing*] It was an honor and a pleasure to meet you, Linda.

LINDA [*withdrawing her hand coldly, frightened*]: Have a nice—trip.

BEN [*to* WILLY]: And good luck with your—what do you do?

WILLY: Selling.

BEN: Yes. Well . . . [*He raises his hand in farewell to all.*]

WILLY: No, Ben, I don't want you to think . . . [*He takes* BEN'S *arm to show him.*] It's Brooklyn, I know, but we hunt too.

BEN: Really, now.

WILLY: Oh, sure, there's snakes and rabbits and—that's why I moved out here. Why, Biff can fell any one of these trees in no time! Boys! Go right over to where they're building the apartment house and get some sand. We're gonna rebuild the entire front stoop right now! Watch this, Ben!

BIFF: Yes, sir! On the double, Hap!

HAPPY [*as he and* BIFF *run off*]: I lost weight, Pop, you notice?

[CHARLEY *enters in knickers, even before the boys are gone.*]

CHARLEY: Listen, if they steal any more from that building the watchman'll put the cops on them!

LINDA [*to* WILLY]: Don't let Biff . . .

[BEN *laughs lustily.*]

WILLY: You shoulda seen the lumber they brought home last week. At least a dozen six-by-tens worth all kinds a money.

CHARLEY: Listen, if that watchman—

WILLY: I gave them hell, understand. But I got a couple of fearless characters there.

CHARLEY: Willy, the jails are full of fearless characters.

BEN [*clapping* WILLY *on the back, with a laugh at* CHARLEY]: And the stock exchange, friend!

WILLY [*joining in* BEN'S *laughter*]: Where are the rest of your pants?

CHARLEY: My wife bought them.

WILLY: Now all you need is a golf club and you can go upstairs and go to sleep. [*To* BEN] Great athlete! Between him and his son Bernard they can't hammer a nail!

BERNARD [*rushing in*]: The watchman's chasing Biff!

WILLY [*angrily*]: Shut up! He's not stealing anything!

LINDA [*alarmed, hurrying off left*]: Where is he? Biff, dear! [*She exits.*]

WILLY [*moving toward the left, away from* BEN]: There's nothing wrong. What's the matter with you?

BEN: Nervy boy. Good!

WILLY [*laughing*]: Oh, nerves of iron, that Biff!

CHARLEY: Don't know what it is. My New England man comes back and he's bleedin', they murdered him up there.

WILLY: It's contacts, Charley, I got important contacts!

CHARLEY [*sarcastically*]: Glad to hear it, Willy. Come in later, we'll shoot a

little casino. I'll take some of your Portland money. [*He laughs at* WILLY *and exits.*]

WILLY [*turning to* BEN]: Business is bad, it's murderous. But not for me, of course.

BEN: I'll stop by on my way back to Africa.

WILLY [*longingly*]: Can't you stay a few days? You're just what I need, Ben, because I—I have a fine position here, but I—well, Dad left when I was such a baby and I never had a chance to talk to him and I still feel—kind of temporary about myself.

BEN: I'll be late for my train.

[*They are at opposite ends of the stage.*]

WILLY: Ben, my boys—can't we talk? They'd go into the jaws of hell for me, see, but I—

BEN: William, you're being first-rate with your boys. Outstanding, manly chaps!

WILLY [*hanging on to his words*]: Oh, Ben, that's good to hear! Because sometimes I'm afraid that I'm not teaching them the right kind of—Ben, how should I teach them?

BEN [*giving great weight to each word, and with a certain vicious audacity*]: William, when I walked into the jungle, I was seventeen. When I walked out I was twenty-one. And, by God, I was rich! [*He goes off into darkness around the right corner of the house.*]

WILLY: . . . was rich! That's just the spirit I want to imbue them with! To walk into a jungle! I was right! I was right! I was right!

> [BEN *is gone, but* WILLY *is still speaking to him as* LINDA, *in nightgown and robe, enters the kitchen, glances around for* WILLY, *then goes to the door of the house, looks out and sees him. Comes down to his left. He looks at her.*]

LINDA: Willy, dear? Willy?

WILLY: I was right!

LINDA: Did you have some cheese? [*He can't answer.*] It's very late, darling.

Come to bed, heh?

WILLY [*looking straight up*]: Gotta break your neck to see a star in this yard.

LINDA: You coming in?

WILLY: Whatever happened to that diamond watch fob? Remember? When Ben came from Africa that time? Didn't he give me a watch fob with a diamond in it?

LINDA: You pawned it, dear. Twelve, thirteen years ago. For Biff's radio correspondence course.

WILLY: Gee, that was a beautiful thing. I'll take a walk.

LINDA: But you're in your slippers.

WILLY [*starting to go around the house at the left*]: I was right! I was! [*Half to* LINDA, *as he goes, shaking his head*] What a man! There was a man worth talking to. I was right!

LINDA [*calling after* WILLY]: But in your slippers, Willy!

[WILLY *is almost gone when* BIFF, *in his pajamas, comes down the stairs and enters the kitchen.*]

BIFF: What is he doing out there?

LINDA: Sh!

BIFF: God Almighty, Mom, how long has he been doing this?

LINDA: Don't, he'll hear you.

BIFF: What the hell is the matter with him?

LINDA: It'll pass by morning.

BIFF: Shouldn't we do anything?

LINDA: Oh, my dear, you should do a lot of things, but there's nothing to do, so go to sleep.

[HAPPY *comes down the stairs and sits on the steps.*]

HAPPY: I never heard him so loud, Mom.

LINDA: Well, come around more often; you'll hear him.

[*She sits down at the table and mends the lining of* WILLY'S *jacket.*]

BIFF: Why didn't you ever write me about this, Mom?

LINDA: How would I write to you? For over three months you had no address.

BIFF: I was on the move. But you know I thought of you all the time. You know that, don't you, pal?

LINDA: I know, dear, I know. But he likes to have a letter. Just to know that there's still a possibility for better things.

BIFF: He's not like this all the time, is he?

LINDA: It's when you come home he's always the worst.

BIFF: When I come home?

LINDA: When you write you're coming, he's all smiles, and talks about the future, and—he's just wonderful. And then the closer you seem to come, the more shaky he gets, and then, by the time you get here, he's arguing, and he seems angry at you. I think it's just that maybe he can't bring himself to—to open up to you. Why are you so hateful to each other? Why is that?

BIFF [*evasively*]: I'm not hateful, Mom.

LINDA: But you no sooner come in the door than you're fighting!

BIFF: I don't know why. I mean to change. I'm tryin', Mom, you understand?

LINDA: Are you home to stay now?

BIFF: I don't know. I want to look around, see what's doin'.

LINDA: Biff, you can't look around all your life, can you?

BIFF: I just can't take hold, Mom. I can't take hold of some kind of a life.

LINDA: Biff, a man is not a bird, to come and go with the springtime.

BIFF: Your hair . . . [*He touches her hair.*] Your hair got so gray.

LINDA: Oh, it's been gray since you were in high school. I just stopped dyeing it, that's all.

BIFF: Dye it again, will ya? I don't want my pal looking old. [*He smiles.*]

LINDA: You're such a boy! You think you can go away for a year and . . .

You've got to get it into your head now that one day you'll knock on this door and there'll be strange people here—

BIFF: What are you talking about? You're not even sixty, Mom.

LINDA: But what about your father?

BIFF [*lamely*]: Well, I meant him too.

HAPPY: He admires Pop.

LINDA: Biff, dear, if you don't have any feeling for him, then you can't have any feeling for me.

BIFF: Sure I can, Mom.

LINDA: No. You can't just come to see me, because I love him. [*With a threat, but only a threat, of tears*] He's the dearest man in the world to me, and I won't have anyone making him feel unwanted and low and blue. You've got to make up your mind now, darling, there's no leeway any more. Either he's your father and you pay him that respect, or else you're not to come here. I know he's not easy to get along with—nobody knows that better than me—but . . .

WILLY [*from the left, with a laugh*]: Hey, hey, Biffo!

BIFF [*starting to go out after* WILLY]: What the hell is the matter with him? [HAPPY *stops him.*]

LINDA: Don't—don't go near him!

BIFF: Stop making excuses for him! He always, always wiped the floor with you. Never had an ounce of respect for you.

HAPPY: He's always had respect for—

BIFF: What the hell do you know about it?

HAPPY [*surlily*]: Just don't call him crazy!

BIFF: He's got no character—Charley wouldn't do this. Not in his own house —spewing out that vomit from his mind.

HAPPY: Charley never had to cope with what he's got to.

BIFF: People are worse off than Willy Loman. Believe me, I've seen them!

LINDA: Then make Charley your father, Biff. You can't do that, can you? I don't say he's a great man. Willy Loman never made a lot of money. His name

was never in the paper. He's not the finest character that ever lived. But he's a human being, and a terrible thing is happening to him. So attention must be paid. He's not to be allowed to fall into his grave like an old dog. Attention, attention must be finally paid to such a person. You called him crazy—

BIFF: I didn't mean—

LINDA: No, a lot of people think he's lost his—balance. But you don't have to be very smart to know what his trouble is. The man is exhausted.

HAPPY: Sure!

LINDA: A small man can be just as exhausted as a great man. He works for a company thirty-six years this March, opens up unheard-of territories to their trademark, and now in his old age they take his salary away.

HAPPY [*indignantly*]: I didn't know that, Mom.

LINDA: You never asked, my dear! Now that you get your spending money someplace else you don't trouble your mind with him.

HAPPY: But I gave you money last—

LINDA: Christmas time, fifty dollars! To fix the hot water it cost ninety-seven fifty! For five weeks he's been on straight commission, like a beginner, an unknown!

BIFF: Those ungrateful bastards!

LINDA: Are they any worse than his sons? When he brought them business, when he was young, they were glad to see him. But now his old friends, the old buyers that loved him so and always found some order to hand him in a pinch—they're all dead, retired. He used to be able to make six, seven calls a day in Boston. Now he takes his valises out of the car and puts them back and takes them out again and he's exhausted. Instead of walking he talks now. He drives seven hundred miles, and when he gets there no one knows him any more, no one welcomes him. And what goes through a man's mind, driving seven hundred miles home without having earned a cent? Why shouldn't he talk to himself? Why? When he has to go to Charley and borrow fifty dollars a week and pretend to me that it's his pay? How long can that go on? How long? You see what I'm sitting here and waiting for? And you tell me he has no character? The man who never worked a day but for your benefit? When does he get the medal for that? Is this his reward—to turn around at the age of sixty-three and find his sons, who

he loved better than his life, one a philandering bum—

HAPPY: Mom!

LINDA: That's all you are, my baby! [*To* BIFF] And you! What happened to the love you had for him? You were such pals! How you used to talk to him on the phone every night! How lonely he was till he could come home to you!

BIFF: All right, Mom. I'll live here in my room, and I'll get a job. I'll keep away from him, that's all.

LINDA: No, Biff. You can't stay here and fight all the time.

BIFF: He threw me out of this house, remember that.

LINDA: Why did he do that? I never knew why.

BIFF: Because I know he's a fake and he doesn't like anybody around who knows!

LINDA: Why a fake? In what way? What do you mean?

BIFF: Just don't lay it all at my feet. It's between me and him—that's all I have to say. I'll chip in from now on. He'll settle for half my pay check. He'll be all right. I'm going to bed. [*He starts for the stairs.*]

LINDA: He won't be all right.

BIFF [*turning on the stairs, furiously*]: I hate this city and I'll stay here. Now what do you want?

LINDA: He's dying, Biff.

[HAPPY *turns quickly to her, shocked.*]

BIFF [*after a pause*]: Why is he dying?

LINDA: He's been trying to kill himself.

BIFF [*with great horror*]: How?

LINDA: I live from day to day.

BIFF: What're you talking about?

LINDA: Remember I wrote you that he smashed up the car again? In February?

BIFF: Well?

LINDA: The insurance inspector came. He said that they have evidence. That all these accidents in the last year—weren't—weren't—accidents.

HAPPY: How can they tell that? That's a lie.

LINDA: It seems there's a woman . . . [*She takes a breath as*]

BIFF [*sharply but contained*]:} What woman?

LINDA [*simultaneously*]: } . . . and this woman . . .

LINDA: What?

BIFF: Nothing. Go ahead.

LINDA: What did you say?

BIFF: Nothing. I just said what woman?

HAPPY: What about her?

LINDA: Well, it seems she was walking down the road and saw his car. She says that he wasn't driving fast at all, and that he didn't skid. She says he came to that little bridge, and then deliberately smashed into the railing, and it was only the shallowness of the water that saved him.

BIFF: Oh, no, he probably just fell asleep again.

LINDA: I don't think he fell asleep.

BIFF: Why not?

LINDA: Last month . . . [*With great difficulty*] Oh, boys, it's so hard to say a thing like this! He's just a big stupid man to you, but I tell you there's more good in him than in many other people. [*She chokes, wipes her eyes.*] I was looking for a fuse. The lights blew out, and I went down the cellar. And behind the fuse box—it happened to fall out—was a length of rubber pipe—just short.

HAPPY: No kidding?

LINDA: There's a little attachment on the end of it. I knew right away. And sure enough, on the bottom of the water heater there's a new little nipple on the gas pipe.

HAPPY [*angrily*]: That—jerk.

BIFF: Did you have it taken off?

LINDA: I'm—I'm ashamed to. How can I mention it to him? Every day I go down and take away that little rubber pipe. But, when he comes home, I put it back where it was. How can I insult him that way? I don't know what to do. I live from day to day, boys. I tell you, I know every thought in his mind. It sounds so old-fashioned and silly, but I tell you he put his whole life into you and you've turned your backs on him. [*She is bent over in the chair, weeping, her face in her hands.*] Biff, I swear to God! Biff, his life is in your hands!

HAPPY [*to* BIFF]: How do you like that damned fool!

BIFF [*kissing her*]: All right, pal, all right. It's all settled now. I've been remiss. I know that, Mom. But now I'll stay, and I swear to you, I'll apply myself. [*Kneeling in front of her, in a fever of self-reproach*] It's just—you see, Mom, I don't fit in business. Not that I won't try. I'll try, and I'll make good.

HAPPY: Sure you will. The trouble with you in business was you never tried to please people.

BIFF: I know, I—

HAPPY: Like when you worked for Harrison's. Bob Harrison said you were tops, and then you go and do some damn fool thing like whistling whole songs in the elevator like a comedian.

BIFF [*against* HAPPY]: So what? I like to whistle sometimes.

HAPPY: You don't raise a guy to a responsible job who whistles in the elevator!

LINDA: Well, don't argue about it now.

HAPPY: Like when you'd go off and swim in the middle of the day instead of taking the line around.

BIFF [*his resentment rising*]: Well, don't you run off? You take off sometimes, don't you? On a nice summer day?

HAPPY: Yeah, but I cover myself!

LINDA: Boys!

HAPPY: If I'm going to take a fade the boss can call any number where I'm supposed to be and they'll swear to him that I just left. I'll tell you something that I hate to say, Biff, but in the business world some of them think you're crazy.

BIFF [*angered*]: Screw the business world!

HAPPY: All right, screw it! Great, but cover yourself!

LINDA: Hap, Hap!

BIFF: I don't care what they think! They've laughed at Dad for years, and you know why? Because we don't belong in this nuthouse of a city! We should be mixing cement on some open plain, or—or carpenters. A carpenter is allowed to whistle!

[WILLY *walks in from the entrance of the house, at left.*]

WILLY: Even your grandfather was better than a carpenter. [*Pause. They watch him.*] You never grew up. Bernard does not whistle in the elevator, I assure you.

BIFF [*as though to laugh* WILLY *out of it*]: Yeah, but you do, Pop.

WILLY: I never in my life whistled in an elevator! And who in the business world thinks I'm crazy?

BIFF: I didn't mean it like that, Pop. Now don't make a whole thing out of it, will ya?

WILLY: Go back to the West! Be a carpenter, a cowboy, enjoy yourself!

LINDA: Willy, he was just saying—

WILLY: I heard what he said!

HAPPY [*trying to quiet* WILLY]: Hey, Pop, come on now . . .

WILLY [*continuing over* HAPPY'S *line*]: They laugh at me, heh? Go to Filene's, go to the Hub, go to Slattery's, Boston. Call out the name Willy Loman and see what happens! Big shot!

BIFF: All right, Pop.

WILLY: Big!

BIFF: All right!

WILLY: Why do you always insult me?

BIFF: I didn't say a word. [*To* LINDA] Did I say a word?

LINDA: He didn't say anything, Willy.

WILLY [*going to the doorway of the living-room*]: All right, good night, good night.

LINDA: Willy, dear, he just decided . . .

WILLY [*to* BIFF]: If you get tired hanging around tomorrow, paint the ceiling I put up in the living-room.

BIFF: I'm leaving early tomorrow.

HAPPY: He's going to see Bill Oliver, Pop.

WILLY [*interestedly*]: Oliver? For what?

BIFF [*with reserve, but trying, trying*]: He always said he'd stake me. I'd like to go into business, so maybe I can take him up on it.

LINDA: Isn't that wonderful?

WILLY: Don't interrupt. What's wonderful about it? There's fifty men in the City of New York who'd stake him. [*To* BIFF] Sporting goods?

BIFF: I guess so. I know something about it and—

WILLY: He knows something about it! You know sporting goods better than Spalding, for God's sake! How much is he giving you?

BIFF: I don't know, I didn't even see him yet, but—

WILLY: Then what're you talkin' about?

BIFF [*getting angry*]: Well, all I said was I'm gonna see him, that's all!

WILLY [*turning away*]: Ah, you're counting your chickens again.

BIFF [*starting left for the stairs*]: Oh, Jesus, I'm going to sleep!

WILLY [*calling after him*]: Don't curse in this house!

BIFF [*turning*]: Since when did you get so clean?

HAPPY [*trying to stop them*]: Wait a . . .

WILLY: Don't use that language to me! I won't have it!

HAPPY [*grabbing* BIFF, *shouts*]: Wait a minute! I got an idea. I got a feasible idea. Come here, Biff, let's talk this over now, let's talk some sense here. When I was down in Florida last time, I thought of a great idea to sell sporting goods. It just came back to me. You and I, Biff—we have a line, the Loman Line. We

train a couple of weeks, and put on a couple of exhibitions, see?

WILLY: That's an idea!

HAPPY: Wait! We form two basketball teams, see? Two water-polo teams. We play each other. It's a million dollars' worth of publicity. Two brothers, see? The Loman Brothers. Displays in the Royal Palms—all the hotels. And banners over the ring and the basketball court: "Loman Brothers." Baby, we could sell sporting goods!

WILLY: That is a one-million-dollar idea!

LINDA: Marvelous!

BIFF: I'm in great shape as far as that's concerned.

HAPPY: And the beauty of it is, Biff, it wouldn't be like a business. We'd be out playin' ball again . . .

BIFF [*enthused*]: Yeah, that's . . .

WILLY: Million-dollar . . .

HAPPY: And you wouldn't get fed up with it, Biff. It'd be the family again. There'd be the old honor, and comradeship, and if you wanted to go off for a swim or somethin' —well you'd do it! Without some smart cooky gettin' up ahead of you!

WILLY: Lick the world! You guys together could absolutely lick the civilized world.

BIFF: I'll see Oliver tomorrow. Hap, if we could work that out . . .

LINDA: Maybe things are beginning to—

WILLY [*wildly enthused, to* LINDA]: Stop interrupting! [*To* BIFF] But don't wear sport jacket and slacks when you see Oliver.

BIFF: No, I'll—

WILLY: A business suit, and talk as little as possible, and don't crack any jokes.

BIFF: He did like me. Always liked me.

LINDA: He loved you!

WILLY [*to* LINDA]: Will you stop! [*To* BIFF] Walk in very serious. You are

not applying for a boy's job. Money is to pass. Be quiet, fine, and serious. Everybody likes a kidder, but nobody lends him money.

HAPPY: I'll try to get some myself, Biff. I'm sure I can.

WILLY: I see great things for you kids, I think your troubles are over. But remember, start big and you'll end big. Ask for fifteen. How much you gonna ask for?

BIFF: Gee, I don't know—

WILLY: And don't say "Gee." "Gee" is a boy's word. A man walking in for fifteen thousand dollars does not say "Gee"!

BIFF: Ten, I think, would be top though.

WILLY: Don't be so modest. You always started too low. Walk in with a big laugh. Don't look worried. Start off with a couple of your good stories to lighten things up. It's not what you say, it's how you say it—because personality always wins the day.

LINDA: Oliver always thought the highest of him—

WILLY: Will you let me talk?

BIFF: Don't yell at her, Pop, will ya?

WILLY [*angrily*]: I was talking, wasn't I?

BIFF: I don't like you yelling at her all the time, and I'm tellin' you, that's all.

WILLY: What're you, takin' over this house?

LINDA: Willy—

WILLY [*turning on her*]: Don't take his side all the time, goddammit!

BIFF [*furiously*]: Stop yelling at her!

WILLY [*suddenly pulling on his cheek, beaten down, guilt ridden*]: Give my best to Bill Oliver—he may remember me. [*He exits through the living-room doorway.*]

LINDA [*her voice subdued*]: What'd you have to start that for? [BIFF *turns away.*] You see how sweet he was as soon as you talked hopefully? [*She goes over to* BIFF.] Come up and say good night to him. Don't let him go to bed that way.

HAPPY: Come on, Biff, let's buck him up.

LINDA: Please, dear. Just say good night. It takes so little to make him happy. Come. [*She goes through the living-room doorway, calling upstairs from within the living-room.*] Your pajamas are hanging in the bathroom, Willy!

HAPPY [*looking toward where* LINDA *went out*]: What a woman! They broke the mold when they made her. You know that, Biff?

BIFF: He's off salary. My God, working on commission!

HAPPY: Well, let's face it: he's no hot-shot selling man. Except that sometimes, you have to admit, he's a sweet personality.

BIFF [*deciding*]: Lend me ten bucks, will ya? I want to buy some new ties.

HAPPY: I'll take you to a place I know. Beautiful stuff. Wear one of my striped shirts tomorrow.

BIFF: She got gray. Mom got awful old. Gee, I'm gonna go in to Oliver tomorrow and knock him for a—

HAPPY: Come on up. Tell that to Dad. Let's give him a whirl. Come on.

BIFF [*steamed up*]: You know, with ten thousand bucks, boy!

HAPPY [*as they go into the living-room*]: That's the talk, Biff, that's the first time I've heard the old confidence out of you! [*From within the living-room, fading off*] You're gonna live with me, kid, and any babe you want just say the word . . . [*The last lines are hardly heard. They are mounting the stairs to their parents' bedroom.*]

LINDA [*entering her bedroom and addressing* WILLY, *who is in the bathroom. She is straightening the bed for him.*] Can you do anything about the shower? It drips.

WILLY [*from the bathroom*]: All of a sudden everything falls to pieces! Goddam plumbing, oughta be sued, those people. I hardly finished putting it in and the thing . . . [*His words rumble off.*]

LINDA: I'm just wondering if Oliver will remember him. You think he might?

WILLY [*coming out of the bathroom in his pajamas*]: Remember him? What's the matter with you, you crazy? If he'd've stayed with Oliver he'd be on

top by now! Wait'll Oliver gets a look at him. You don't know the average caliber any more. The average young man today—[*he is getting into bed*]—is got a caliber of zero. Greatest thing in the world for him was to bum around.

[BIFF *and* HAPPY *enter the bedroom. Slight pause.*]

WILLY [*stops short, looking at* BIFF]: Glad to hear it, boy.

HAPPY: He wanted to say good night to you, sport.

WILLY [*to* BIFF]: Yeah. Knock him dead, boy. What'd you want to tell me?

BIFF: Just take it easy, Pop. Good night. [*He turns to go.*]

WILLY [*unable to resist*]: And if anything falls off the desk while you're talking to him—like a package or something —don't you pick it up. They have office boys for that.

LINDA: I'll make a big breakfast—

WILLY: Will you let me finish? [*To* BIFF] Tell him you were in the business in the West. Not farm work.

BIFF: All right, Dad.

LINDA: I think everything—

WILLY [*going right through her speech*]: And don't undersell yourself. No less than fifteen thousand dollars.

BIFF [*unable to bear him*]: Okay. Good night, Mom. [*He starts moving.*]

WILLY: Because you got a greatness in you, Biff, remember that. You got all kinds a greatness . . . [*He lies back, exhausted.* BIFF *walks out.*]

LINDA [*calling after* BIFF]: Sleep well, darling!

HAPPY: I'm gonna get married, Mom. I wanted to tell you.

LINDA: Go to sleep, dear.

HAPPY [*going*]: I just wanted to tell you.

WILLY: Keep up the good work. [HAPPY *exits.*] God . . . remember that Ebbets Field game? The championship of the city?

LINDA: Just rest. Should I sing to you?

WILLY: Yeah. Sing to me. [LINDA *hums a soft lullaby.*] When that team

came out—he was the tallest, remember?

LINDA: Oh, yes. And in gold.

[BIFF *enters the darkened kitchen, takes a cigarette, and leaves the house. He comes downstage into a golden pool of light. He smokes, staring at the night.*]

WILLY: Like a young god. Hercules—something like that. And the sun, the sun all around him. Remember how he waved to me? Right up from the field, with the representatives of three colleges standing by? And the buyers I brought, and the cheers when he came out—Loman, Loman, Loman! God Almighty, he'll be great yet. A star like that, magnificent, can never really fade away!

[*The light on* WILLY *is fading. The gas heater begins to glow through the kitchen wall, near the stairs, a blue flame beneath red coils.*]

LINDA [*timidly*]: Willy dear, what has he got against you?

WILLY: I'm so tired. Don't talk any more.

[BIFF *slowly returns to the kitchen. He stops, stares toward the heater.*]

LINDA: Will you ask Howard to let you work in New York?

WILLY: First thing in the morning. Everything'll be all right.

[BIFF *reaches behind the heater and draws out a length of rubber tubing. He is horrified and turns his head toward* WILLY'S *room, still dimly lit, from which the strains of* LINDA'S *desperate but monotonous humming rise.*]

WILLY [*staring through the window into the moonlight*]: Gee, look at the moon moving between the buildings!

[BIFF *wraps the tubing around his hand and quickly goes up the stairs.*]

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

Music is heard, gay and bright. The curtain rises as the music fades away.

[WILLY, *in shirt sleeves, is sitting at the kitchen table, sipping coffee, his hat in his lap.* LINDA *is filling his cup when she can.*]

WILLY: Wonderful coffee. Meal in itself.

LINDA: Can I make you some eggs?

WILLY: No. Take a breath.

LINDA: You look so rested, dear.

WILLY: I slept like a dead one. First time in months. Imagine, sleeping till ten on a Tuesday morning. Boys left nice and early, heh?

LINDA: They were out of here by eight o'clock.

WILLY: Good work!

LINDA: It was so thrilling to see them leaving together. I can't get over the shaving lotion in this house!

WILLY [*smiling*]: Mmm—

LINDA: Biff was very changed this morning. His whole attitude seemed to be hopeful. He couldn't wait to get downtown to see Oliver.

WILLY: He's heading for a change. There's no question, there simply are certain men that take longer to get—solidified. How did he dress?

LINDA: His blue suit. He's so handsome in that suit. He could be a—anything in that suit!

[WILLY *gets up from the table.* LINDA *holds his jacket for him.*]

WILLY: There's no question, no question at all. Gee, on the way home tonight I'd like to buy some seeds.

LINDA [*laughing*]: That'd be wonderful. But not enough sun gets back there. Nothing'll grow any more.

WILLY: You wait, kid, before it's all over we're gonna get a little place out in the country, and I'll raise some vegetables, a couple of chickens . . .

LINDA: You'll do it yet, dear.

[WILLY *walks out of his jacket.* LINDA *follows him.*]

WILLY: And they'll get married, and come for a weekend. I'd build a little guest house. 'Cause I got so many fine tools, all I'd need would be a little lumber and some peace of mind.

LINDA [*joyfully*]: I sewed the lining . . .

WILLY: I could build two guest houses, so they'd both come. Did he decide how much he's going to ask Oliver for?

LINDA [*getting him into the jacket*]: He didn't mention it, but I imagine ten or fifteen thousand. You going to talk to Howard today?

WILLY: Yeah. I'll put it to him straight and simple. He'll just have to take me off the road.

LINDA: And Willy, don't forget to ask for a little advance, because we've got the insurance premium. It's the grace period now.

WILLY: That's a hundred . . . ?

LINDA: A hundred and eight, sixty-eight. Because we're a little short again.

WILLY: Why are we short?

LINDA: Well, you had the motor job on the car . . .

WILLY: That goddam Studebaker!

LINDA: And you got one more payment on the refrigerator . . .

WILLY: But it just broke again!

LINDA: Well, it's old, dear.

WILLY: I told you we should've bought a well-advertised machine. Charley bought a General Electric and it's twenty years old and it's still good, that son-of-a-bitch.

LINDA: But, Willy—

WILLY: Whoever heard of a Hastings refrigerator? Once in my life I would

like to own something outright before it's broken! I'm always in a race with the junkyard! I just finished paying for the car and it's on its last legs. The refrigerator consumes belts like a goddam maniac. They time those things. They time them so when you finally paid for them, they're used up.

LINDA [*buttoning up his jacket as he unbuttons it*]: All told, about two hundred dollars would carry us, dear. But that includes the last payment on the mortgage. After this payment, Willy, the house belongs to us.

WILLY: It's twenty-five years!

LINDA: Biff was nine years old when we bought it.

WILLY: Well, that's a great thing. To weather a twenty-five-year mortgage is —

LINDA: It's an accomplishment.

WILLY: All the cement, the lumber, the reconstruction I put in this house! There ain't a crack to be found in it any more.

LINDA: Well, it served its purpose.

WILLY: What purpose? Some stranger'll come along, move in, and that's that. If only Biff would take this house, and raise a family . . . [*He starts to go.*] Good-bye, I'm late.

LINDA [*suddenly remembering*]: Oh, I forgot! You're supposed to meet them for dinner.

WILLY: Me?

LINDA: At Frank's Chop House on Forty-eighth near Sixth Avenue.

WILLY: Is that so! How about you?

LINDA: No, just the three of you. They're gonna blow you to a big meal!

WILLY: Don't say! Who thought of that?

LINDA: Biff came to me this morning, Willy, and he said, "Tell Dad, we want to blow him to a big meal." Be there six o'clock. You and your two boys are going to have dinner.

WILLY: Gee whiz! That's really somethin'. I'm gonna knock Howard for a loop, kid. I'll get an advance, and I'll come home with a New York job.

Goddammit, now I'm gonna do it!

LINDA: Oh, that's the spirit, Willy!

WILLY: I will never get behind a wheel the rest of my life!

LINDA: It's changing, Willy, I can feel it changing!

WILLY: Beyond a question. G'bye, I'm late. [*He starts to go again.*]

LINDA [*calling after him as she runs to the kitchen table for a handkerchief*]: You got your glasses?

WILLY [*feels for them, then comes back in*]: Yeah, yeah, got my glasses.

LINDA [*giving him the handkerchief*]: And a handkerchief.

WILLY: Yeah, handkerchief.

LINDA: And your saccharine?

WILLY: Yeah, my saccharine.

LINDA: Be careful on the subway stairs.

[*She kisses him, and a silk stocking is seen hanging from her hand.* WILLY *notices it.*]

WILLY: Will you stop mending stockings? At least while I'm in the house. It gets me nervous. I can't tell you. Please.

[LINDA *hides the stocking in her hand as she follows* WILLY *across the forestage in front of the house.*]

LINDA: Remember, Frank's Chop House.

WILLY [*passing the apron*]: Maybe beets would grow out there.

LINDA [*laughing*]: But you tried so many times.

WILLY: Yeah. Well, don't work hard today. [*He disappears around the right corner of the house.*]

LINDA: Be careful!

[As WILLY *vanishes,* LINDA *waves to him. Suddenly the phone rings. She runs across the stage and into the kitchen and lifts it.*]

LINDA: Hello? Oh, Biff! I'm so glad you called, I just . . . Yes, sure, I just

told him. Yes, he'll be there for dinner at six o'clock, I didn't forget. Listen, I was just dying to tell you. You know that little rubber pipe I told you about? That he connected to the gas heater? I finally decided to go down the cellar this morning and take it away and destroy it. But it's gone! Imagine? He took it away himself, it isn't there! [*She listens.*] When? Oh, then you took it. Oh—nothing, it's just that I'd hoped he'd taken it away himself. Oh, I'm not worried, darling, because this morning he left in such high spirits, it was like the old days! I'm not afraid any more. Did Mr. Oliver see you? . . . Well, you wait there then. And make a nice impression on him, darling. Just don't perspire too much before you see him. And have a nice time with Dad. He may have big news too! . . . That's right, a New York job. And be sweet to him tonight, dear. Be loving to him. Because he's only a little boat looking for a harbor. [*She is trembling with sorrow and joy.*] Oh, that's wonderful, Biff, you'll save his life. Thanks, darling. Just put your arm around him when he comes into the restaurant. Give him a smile. That's the boy . . . Good-bye, dear . . . You got your comb? . . . That's fine. Good-bye, Biff dear.

[*In the middle of her speech,* HOWARD WAGNER, *thirty-six, wheels on a small typewriter table on which is a wire-recording machine and proceeds to plug it in. This is on the left forestage. Light slowly fades on* LINDA *as it rises on* HOWARD. HOWARD *is intent on threading the machine and only glances over his shoulder as* WILLY *appears.*]

WILLY: Pst! Pst!

HOWARD: Hello, Willy, come in.

WILLY: Like to have a little talk with you, Howard.

HOWARD: Sorry to keep you waiting. I'll be with you in a minute.

WILLY: What's that, Howard?

HOWARD: Didn't you ever see one of these? Wire recorder.

WILLY: Oh. Can we talk a minute?

HOWARD: Records things. Just got delivery yesterday. Been driving me crazy, the most terrific machine I ever saw in my life. I was up all night with it.

WILLY: What do you do with it?

HOWARD: I bought it for dictation, but you can do anything with it. Listen to

this. I had it home last night. Listen to what I picked up. The first one is my daughter. Get this. [*He flicks the switch and "Roll out the Barrel" is heard being whistled.*] Listen to that kid whistle.

WILLY: That is lifelike, isn't it?

HOWARD: Seven years old. Get that tone.

WILLY: Ts, ts. Like to ask a little favor if you . . .

[*The whistling breaks off, and the voice of* HOWARD'S *daughter is heard.*]

HIS DAUGHTER: "Now you, Daddy."

HOWARD: She's crazy for me! [*Again the same song is whistled.*] That's me! Ha! [*He winks.*]

WILLY: You're very good!

[*The whistling breaks off again. The machine runs silent for a moment.*]

HOWARD: Sh! Get this now, this is my son.

HIS SON: "The capital of Alabama is Montgomery; the capital of Arizona is Phoenix; the capital of Arkansas is Little Rock; the capital of California is Sacramento . . ." [*and on, and on.*]

HOWARD [*holding up five fingers*]: Five years old, Willy!

WILLY: He'll make an announcer some day!

HIS SON [*continuing*]: "The capital . . ."

HOWARD: Get that—alphabetical order! [*The machine breaks off suddenly.*] Wait a minute. The maid kicked the plug out.

WILLY: It certainly is a—

HOWARD: Sh, for God's sake!

HIS SON: "It's nine o'clock, Bulova watch time. So I have to go to sleep."

WILLY: That really is—

HOWARD: Wait a minute! The next is my wife.

[*They wait.*]

HOWARD'S VOICE: "Go on, say something." [*Pause.*] "Well, you gonna talk?"

HIS WIFE: "I can't think of anything."

HOWARD'S VOICE: "Well, talk—it's turning."

HIS WIFE [*shyly, beaten*]: "Hello." [*Silence.*] "Oh, Howard, I can't talk into this . . ."

HOWARD [*snapping the machine off*]: That was my wife.

WILLY: That is a wonderful machine. Can we—

HOWARD: I tell you, Willy, I'm gonna take my camera, and my bandsaw, and all my hobbies, and out they go. This is the most fascinating relaxation I ever found.

WILLY: I think I'll get one myself.

HOWARD: Sure, they're only a hundred and a half. You can't do without it. Supposing you wanna hear Jack Benny, see? But you can't be at home at that hour. So you tell the maid to turn the radio on when Jack Benny comes on, and this automatically goes on with the radio . . .

WILLY: And when you come home you . . .

HOWARD: You can come home twelve o'clock, one o'clock, any time you like, and you get yourself a Coke and sit yourself down, throw the switch, and there's Jack Benny's program in the middle of the night!

WILLY: I'm definitely going to get one. Because lots of time I'm on the road, and I think to myself, what I must be missing on the radio!

HOWARD: Don't you have a radio in the car?

WILLY: Well, yeah, but who ever thinks of turning it on?

HOWARD: Say, aren't you supposed to be in Boston?

WILLY: That's what I want to talk to you about, Howard. You got a minute? [*He draws a chair in from the wing.*]

HOWARD: What happened? What're you doing here?

WILLY: Well . . .

HOWARD: You didn't crack up again, did you?

WILLY: Oh, no. No . . .

HOWARD: Geez, you had me worried there for a minute. What's the trouble?

WILLY: Well, tell you the truth, Howard. I've come to the decision that I'd rather not travel any more.

HOWARD: Not travel! Well, what'll you do?

WILLY: Remember, Christmas time, when you had the party here? You said you'd try to think of some spot for me here in town.

HOWARD: With us?

WILLY: Well, sure.

HOWARD: Oh, yeah, yeah. I remember. Well, I couldn't think of anything for you, Willy.

WILLY: I tell ya, Howard. The kids are all grown up, y'know. I don't need much any more. If I could take home—well, sixty-five dollars a week, I could swing it.

HOWARD: Yeah, but Willy, see I—

WILLY: I tell ya why, Howard. Speaking frankly and between the two of us, y'know—I'm just a little tired.

HOWARD: Oh, I could understand that, Willy. But you're a road man, Willy, and we do a road business. We've only got a half-dozen salesmen on the floor here.

WILLY: God knows, Howard, I never asked a favor of any man. But I was with the firm when your father used to carry you in here in his arms.

HOWARD: I know that, Willy, but—

WILLY: Your father came to me the day you were born and asked me what I thought of the name of Howard, may he rest in peace.

HOWARD: I appreciate that, Willy, but there just is no spot here for you. If I had a spot I'd slam you right in, but I just don't have a single solitary spot.

[*He looks for his lighter.* WILLY *has picked it up and gives it to him. Pause.*]

WILLY [*with increasing anger*]: Howard, all I need to set my table is fifty

dollars a week.

HOWARD: But where am I going to put you, kid?

WILLY: Look, it isn't a question of whether I can sell merchandise, is it?

HOWARD: No, but it's a business, kid, and everybody's gotta pull his own weight.

WILLY [*desperately*]: Just let me tell you a story, Howard—

HOWARD: 'Cause you gotta admit, business is business.

WILLY [*angrily*]: Business is definitely business, but just listen for a minute. You don't understand this. When I was a boy—eighteen, nineteen—I was already on the road. And there was a question in my mind as to whether selling had a future for me. Because in those days I had a yearning to go to Alaska. See, there were three gold strikes in one month in Alaska, and I felt like going out. Just for the ride, you might say.

HOWARD [*barely interested*]: Don't say.

WILLY: Oh, yeah, my father lived many years in Alaska. He was an adventurous man. We've got quite a little streak of self-reliance in our family. I thought I'd go out with my older brother and try to locate him, and maybe settle in the North with the old man. And I was almost decided to go, when I met a salesman in the Parker House. His name was Dave Singleman. And he was eighty-four years old, and he'd drummed merchandise in thirty-one states. And old Dave, he'd go up to his room, y'understand, put on his green velvet slippers —I'll never forget—and pick up his phone and call the buyers, and without ever leaving his room, at the age of eighty-four, he made his living. And when I saw that, I realized that selling was the greatest career a man could want. 'Cause what could be more satisfying than to be able to go, at the age of eighty-four, into twenty or thirty different cities, and pick up a phone, and be remembered and loved and helped by so many different people? Do you know? when he died —and by the way he died the death of a salesman, in his green velvet slippers in the smoker of the New York, New Haven, and Hartford, going into Boston — when he died, hundreds of salesmen and buyers were at his funeral. Things were sad on a lotta trains for months after that. [*He stands up.* HOWARD *has not looked at him.*] In those days there was personality in it, Howard. There was respect, and comradeship, and gratitude in it. Today, it's all cut and dried, and there's no chance for bringing friendship to bear —or personality. You see what

I mean? They don't know me any more.

HOWARD [*moving away, to the right*]: That's just the thing, Willy.

WILLY: If I had forty dollars a week—that's all I'd need. Forty dollars, Howard.

HOWARD: Kid, I can't take blood from a stone, I—

WILLY [*desperation is on him now*]: Howard, the year Al Smith was nominated, your father came to me and—

HOWARD [*starting to go off*]: I've got to see some people, kid.

WILLY [*stopping him*]: I'm talking about your father! There were promises made across this desk! You mustn't tell me you've got people to see—I put thirty-four years into this firm, Howard, and now I can't pay my insurance! You can't eat the orange and throw the peel away—a man is not a piece of fruit! [*After a pause*] Now pay attention. Your father—in 1928 I had a big year. I averaged a hundred and seventy dollars a week in commissions.

HOWARD [*impatiently*]: Now, Willy, you never averaged—

WILLY [*banging his hand on the desk*]: I averaged a hundred and seventy dollars a week in the year of 1928! And your father came to me—or rather, I was in the office here—it was right over this desk—and he put his hand on my shoulder—

HOWARD [*getting up*]: You'll have to excuse me, Willy, I gotta see some people. Pull yourself together. [*Going out*] I'll be back in a little while.

[*On* HOWARD'S *exit, the light on his chair grows very bright and strange.*]

WILLY: Pull myself together! What the hell did I say to him? My God, I was yelling at him! How could I! [WILLY *breaks off, staring at the light, which occupies the chair, animating it. He approaches this chair, standing across the desk from it.*] Frank, Frank, don't you remember what you told me that time? How you put your hand on my shoulder, and Frank . . . [*He leans on the desk and as he speaks the dead man's name he accidentally switches on the recorder, and instantly—*]

HOWARD'S SON: ". . . of New York is Albany. The capital of Ohio is Cincinnati, the capital of Rhode Island is . . ." [*The recitation continues.*]

WILLY [*leaping away with fright, shouting*]: Ha! Howard! Howard! Howard!

HOWARD [*rushing in*]: What happened?

WILLY [*pointing at the machine, which continues nasally, childishly, with the capital cities*]: Shut it off! Shut it off!

HOWARD [*pulling the plug out*]: Look, Willy . . .

WILLY [*pressing his hands to his eyes*]: I gotta get myself some coffee. I'll get some coffee . . .

[WILLY *starts to walk out.* HOWARD *stops him.*]

HOWARD [*rolling up the cord*]: Willy, look . . .

WILLY: I'll go to Boston.

HOWARD: Willy, you can't go to Boston for us.

WILLY: Why can't I go?

HOWARD: I don't want you to represent us. I've been meaning to tell you for a long time now.

WILLY: Howard, are you firing me?

HOWARD: I think you need a good long rest, Willy.

WILLY: Howard—

HOWARD: And when you feel better, come back, and we'll see if we can work something out.

WILLY: But I gotta earn money, Howard. I'm in no position to—

HOWARD: Where are your sons? Why don't your sons give you a hand?

WILLY: They're working on a very big deal.

HOWARD: This is no time for false pride, Willy. You go to your sons and you tell them that you're tired. You've got two great boys, haven't you?

WILLY: Oh, no question, no question, but in the meantime . . .

HOWARD: Then that's that, heh?

WILLY: All right, I'll go to Boston tomorrow.

HOWARD: No, no.

WILLY: I can't throw myself on my sons. I'm not a cripple!

HOWARD: Look, kid, I'm busy this morning.

WILLY [*grasping* HOWARD'S *arm*]: Howard, you've got to let me go to Boston!

HOWARD [*hard, keeping himself under control*]: I've got a line of people to see this morning. Sit down, take five minutes, and pull yourself together, and then go home, will ya? I need the office, Willy. [*He starts to go, turns, remembering the recorder, starts to push off the table holding the recorder.*] Oh, yeah. Whenever you can this week, stop by and drop off the samples. You'll feel better, Willy, and then come back and we'll talk. Pull yourself together, kid, there's people outside.

> [HOWARD *exits, pushing the table off left.* WILLY *stares into space, exhausted. Now the music is heard*—BEN'S *music—first distantly, then closer, closer. As* WILLY *speaks,* BEN *enters from the right. He carries valise and umbrella.*]

WILLY: Oh, Ben, how did you do it? What is the answer? Did you wind up the Alaska deal already?

BEN: Doesn't take much time if you know what you're doing. Just a short business trip. Boarding ship in an hour. Wanted to say good-bye.

WILLY: Ben, I've got to talk to you.

BEN [*glancing at his watch*]: Haven't the time, William.

WILLY [*crossing the apron to* BEN]: Ben, nothing's working out. I don't know what to do.

BEN: Now, look here, William. I've bought timberland in Alaska and I need a man to look after things for me.

WILLY: God, timberland! Me and my boys in those grand outdoors!

BEN: You've a new continent at your doorstep, William. Get out of these cities, they're full of talk and time payments and courts of law. Screw on your fists and you can fight for a fortune up there.

WILLY: Yes, yes! Linda, Linda!

[LINDA *enters as of old, with the wash.*]

LINDA: Oh, you're back?

BEN: I haven't much time.

WILLY: No, wait! Linda, he's got a proposition for me in Alaska.

LINDA: But you've got—[*To* BEN] He's got a beautiful job here.

WILLY: But in Alaska, kid, I could—

LINDA: You're doing well enough, Willy!

BEN [*to* LINDA]: Enough for what, my dear?

LINDA [*frightened of* BEN *and angry at him*]: Don't say those things to him! Enough to be happy right here, right now. [*To* WILLY, *while* BEN *laughs*] Why must everybody conquer the world? You're well liked, and the boys love you, and someday—[*to* BEN]—why, old man Wagner told him just the other day that if he keeps it up he'll be a member of the firm, didn't he, Willy?

WILLY: Sure, sure. I am building something with this firm, Ben, and if a man is building something he must be on the right track, mustn't he?

BEN: What are you building? Lay your hand on it. Where is it?

WILLY [*hesitantly*]: That's true, Linda, there's nothing.

LINDA: Why? [*To* BEN] There's a man eighty-four years old—

WILLY: That's right, Ben, that's right. When I look at that man I say, what is there to worry about?

BEN: Bah!

WILLY: It's true, Ben. All he has to do is go into any city, pick up the phone, and he's making his living and you know why?

BEN [*picking up his valise*]: I've got to go.

WILLY [*holding* BEN *back*]: Look at this boy!

> [BIFF, *in his high school sweater, enters carrying suitcase.* HAPPY *carries* BIFF'S *shoulder guards, gold helmet, and football pants.*]

WILLY: Without a penny to his name, three great universities are begging for him, and from there the sky's the limit, because it's not what you do, Ben. It's who you know and the smile on your face! It's contacts, Ben, contacts! The whole wealth of Alaska passes over the lunch table at the Commodore Hotel,

and that's the wonder, the wonder of this country, that a man can end with diamonds here on the basis of being liked! [*He turns to* BIFF.] And that's why when you get out on that field today it's important. Because thousands of people will be rooting for you and loving you. [*To* BEN, *who has again begun to leave*] And Ben! when he walks into a business office his name will sound out like a bell and all the doors will open to him! I've seen it, Ben, I've seen it a thousand times! You can't feel it with your hand like timber, but it's there!

BEN: Good-bye, William.

WILLY: Ben, am I right? Don't you think I'm right? I value your advice.

BEN: There's a new continent at your doorstep, William. You could walk out rich. Rich! [*He is gone.*]

WILLY: We'll do it here, Ben! You hear me? We're gonna do it here!

[*Young* BERNARD *rushes in. The gay music of the boys is heard.*]

BERNARD: Oh, gee, I was afraid you left already!

WILLY: Why? What time is it?

BERNARD: It's half-past one!

WILLY: Well, come on, everybody! Ebbets Field next stop! Where's the pennants? [*He rushes through the wall-line of the kitchen and out into the living-room.*]

LINDA [*to* BIFF]: Did you pack fresh underwear?

BIFF [*who has been limbering up*]: I want to go!

BERNARD: Biff, I'm carrying your helmet, ain't I?

HAPPY: No, I'm carrying the helmet.

BERNARD: Oh, Biff, you promised me.

HAPPY: I'm carrying the helmet.

BERNARD: How am I going to get in the locker room?

LINDA: Let him carry the shoulder guards. [*She puts her coat and hat on in the kitchen.*]

BERNARD: Can I, Biff? 'Cause I told everybody I'm going to be in the locker room.

HAPPY: In Ebbets Field it's the clubhouse.

BERNARD: I meant the clubhouse. Biff!

HAPPY: Biff!

BIFF [*grandly, after a slight pause*]: Let him carry the shoulder guards.

HAPPY [*as he gives* BERNARD *the shoulder guards*]: Stay close to us now.

[WILLY *rushes in with the pennants.*]

WILLY [*handing them out*]: Everybody wave when Biff comes out on the field. [HAPPY *and* BERNARD *run off.*] You set now, boy?

[*The music has died away.*]

BIFF: Ready to go, Pop. Every muscle is ready.

WILLY [*at the edge of the apron*]: You realize what this means?

BIFF: That's right, Pop.

WILLY [*feeling* BIFF'S *muscles*]: You're comin' home this afternoon captain of the All-Scholastic Championship Team of the City of New York.

BIFF: I got it, Pop. And remember, pal, when I take off my helmet, that touchdown is for you.

WILLY: Let's go! [*He is starting out, with his arm around* BIFF, *when* CHARLEY *enters, as of old, in knickers.*] I got no room for you, Charley.

CHARLEY: Room? For what?

WILLY: In the car.

CHARLEY: You goin' for a ride? I wanted to shoot some casino.

WILLY [*furiously*]: Casino! [*Incredulously*] Don't you realize what today is?

LINDA: Oh, he knows, Willy. He's just kidding you.

WILLY: That's nothing to kid about!

CHARLEY: No. Linda, what's goin' on?

LINDA: He's playing in Ebbets Field.

CHARLEY: Baseball in this weather?

WILLY: Don't talk to him. Come on, come on! [*He is pushing them out.*]

CHARLEY: Wait a minute, didn't you hear the news?

WILLY: What?

CHARLEY: Don't you listen to the radio? Ebbets Field just blew up.

WILLY: You go to hell! [CHARLEY *laughs. Pushing them out*] Come on, come on! We're late.

CHARLEY [*as they go*]: Knock a homer, Biff, knock a homer!

WILLY [*the last to leave, turning to* CHARLEY]: I don't think that was funny, Charley. This is the greatest day of his life.

CHARLEY: Willy, when are you going to grow up?

WILLY: Yeah, heh? When this game is over, Charley, you'll be laughing out of the other side of your face. They'll be calling him another Red Grange. Twenty-five thousand a year.

CHARLEY [*kidding*]: Is that so?

WILLY: Yeah, that's so.

CHARLEY: Well, then, I'm sorry, Willy. But tell me something.

WILLY: What?

CHARLEY: Who is Red Grange?

WILLY: Put up your hands. Goddam you, put up your hands!

[CHARLEY, *chuckling, shakes his head and walks away, around the left corner of the stage.* WILLY *follows him. The music rises to a mocking frenzy.*]

WILLY: Who the hell do you think you are, better than everybody else? You don't know everything, you big, ignorant, stupid . . . Put up your hands!

[*Light rises, on the right side of the forestage, on a small table in the reception room of* CHARLEY'S *office. Traffic sounds are heard.* BERNARD, *now mature, sits whistling to himself. A pair of tennis rackets and an overnight bag are on the floor beside him.*]

WILLY [*offstage*]: What are you walking away for? Don't walk away! If you're going to say something say it to my face! I know you laugh at me behind

my back. You'll laugh out of the other side of your goddam face after this game. Touchdown! Touchdown! Eighty thousand people! Touchdown! Right between the goal posts.

[BERNARD *is a quiet, earnest, but self-assured young man.* WILLY'S *voice is coming from right upstage now.* BERNARD *lowers his feet off the table and listens.* JENNY, *his father's secretary, enters.*]

JENNY [*distressed*]: Say, Bernard, will you go out in the hall?

BERNARD: What is that noise? Who is it?

JENNY: Mr. Loman. He just got off the elevator.

BERNARD [*getting up*]: Who's he arguing with?

JENNY: Nobody. There's nobody with him. I can't deal with him any more, and your father gets all upset everytime he comes. I've got a lot of typing to do, and your father's waiting to sign it. Will you see him?

WILLY [*entering*]: Touchdown! Touch—[*He sees* JENNY.] Jenny, Jenny, good to see you. How're ya? Workin'? Or still honest?

JENNY: Fine. How've you been feeling?

WILLY: Not much any more, Jenny. Ha, ha! [*He is surprised to see the rackets.*]

BERNARD: Hello, Uncle Willy.

WILLY [*almost shocked*]: Bernard! Well, look who's here!

[*He comes quickly, guiltily, to* BERNARD *and warmly shakes his hand.*]

BERNARD: How are you? Good to see you.

WILLY: What are you doing here?

BERNARD: Oh, just stopped by to see Pop. Get off my feet till my train leaves. I'm going to Washington in a few minutes.

WILLY: Is he in?

BERNARD: Yes, he's in his office with the accountant. Sit down.

WILLY [*sitting down*]: What're you going to do in Washington?

BERNARD: Oh, just a case I've got there, Willy.

WILLY: That so? [*Indicating the rackets*] You going to play tennis there?

BERNARD: I'm staying with a friend who's got a court.

WILLY: Don't say. His own tennis court. Must be fine people, I bet.

BERNARD: They are, very nice. Dad tells me Biff 's in town.

WILLY [*with a big smile*]: Yeah, Biff 's in. Working on a very big deal, Bernard.

BERNARD: What's Biff doing?

WILLY: Well, he's been doing very big things in the West. But he decided to establish himself here. Very big. We're having dinner. Did I hear your wife had a boy?

BERNARD: That's right. Our second.

WILLY: Two boys! What do you know!

BERNARD: What kind of a deal has Biff got?

WILLY: Well, Bill Oliver—very big sporting-goods man —he wants Biff very badly. Called him in from the West. Long distance, carte blanche, special deliveries. Your friends have their own private tennis court?

BERNARD: You still with the old firm, Willy?

WILLY [*after a pause*]: I'm—I'm overjoyed to see how you made the grade, Bernard, overjoyed. It's an encouraging thing to see a young man really—really —Looks very good for Biff—very—[*He breaks off, then*] Bernard—[*He is so full of emotion, he breaks off again.*]

BERNARD: What is it, Willy?

WILLY [*small and alone*]: What—what's the secret?

BERNARD: What secret?

WILLY: How—how did you? Why didn't he ever catch on?

BERNARD: I wouldn't know that, Willy.

WILLY [*confidentially, desperately*]: You were his friend, his boyhood friend. There's something I don't understand about it. His life ended after that Ebbets Field game. From the age of seventeen nothing good ever happened to him.

BERNARD: He never trained himself for anything.

WILLY: But he did, he did. After high school he took so many correspondence courses. Radio mechanics; television; God knows what, and never made the slightest mark.

BERNARD [*taking off his glasses*]: Willy, do you want to talk candidly?

WILLY [*rising, faces* BERNARD]: I regard you as a very brilliant man, Bernard. I value your advice.

BERNARD: Oh, the hell with the advice, Willy. I couldn't advise you. There's just one thing I've always wanted to ask you. When he was supposed to graduate, and the math teacher flunked him—

WILLY: Oh, that son-of-a-bitch ruined his life.

BERNARD: Yeah, but, Willy, all he had to do was to go to summer school and make up that subject.

WILLY: That's right, that's right.

BERNARD: Did you tell him not to go to summer school?

WILLY: Me? I begged him to go. I ordered him to go!

BERNARD: Then why wouldn't he go?

WILLY: Why? Why! Bernard, that question has been trailing me like a ghost for the last fifteen years. He flunked the subject, and laid down and died like a hammer hit him!

BERNARD: Take it easy, kid.

WILLY: Let me talk to you—I got nobody to talk to. Bernard, Bernard, was it my fault? Y'see? It keeps going around in my mind, maybe I did something to him. I got nothing to give him.

BERNARD: Don't take it so hard.

WILLY: Why did he lay down? What is the story there? You were his friend!

BERNARD: Willy, I remember, it was June, and our grades came out. And he'd flunked math.

WILLY: That son-of-a-bitch!

BERNARD: No, it wasn't right then. Biff just got very angry, I remember, and he was ready to enroll in summer school.

WILLY [*surprised*]: He was?

BERNARD: He wasn't beaten by it at all. But then, Willy, he disappeared from the block for almost a month. And I got the idea that he'd gone up to New England to see you. Did he have a talk with you then?

[WILLY *stares in silence.*]

BERNARD: Willy?

WILLY [*with a strong edge of resentment in his voice*]: Yeah, he came to Boston. What about it?

BERNARD: Well, just that when he came back—I'll never forget this, it always mystifies me. Because I'd thought so well of Biff, even though he'd always taken advantage of me. I loved him, Willy, y'know? And he came back after that month and took his sneakers—remember those sneakers with "University of Virginia" printed on them? He was so proud of those, wore them every day. And he took them down in the cellar, and burned them up in the furnace. We had a fist fight. It lasted at least half an hour. Just the two of us, punching each other down the cellar, and crying right through it. I've often thought of how strange it was that I knew he'd given up his life. What happened in Boston, Willy?

[WILLY *looks at him as at an intruder.*]

BERNARD: I just bring it up because you asked me.

WILLY [*angrily*]: Nothing. What do you mean, "What happened?" What's that got to do with anything?

BERNARD: Well, don't get sore.

WILLY: What are you trying to do, blame it on me? If a boy lays down is that my fault?

BERNARD: Now, Willy, don't get—

WILLY: Well, don't—don't talk to me that way! What does that mean, "What happened?"

[CHARLEY *enters. He is in his vest, and he carries a bottle of bourbon.*]

CHARLEY: Hey, you're going to miss that train. [*He waves the bottle.*]

BERNARD: Yeah, I'm going. [*He takes the bottle.*] Thanks, Pop. [*He picks up his rackets and bag.*] Good-bye, Willy, and don't worry about it. You know, "If at first you don't succeed . . ."

WILLY: Yes, I believe in that.

BERNARD: But sometimes, Willy, it's better for a man just to walk away.

WILLY: Walk away?

BERNARD: That's right.

WILLY: But if you can't walk away?

BERNARD [*after a slight pause*]: I guess that's when it's tough.

[*Extending his hand*] Good-bye, Willy.

WILLY [*shaking* BERNARD'S *hand*]: Good-bye, boy.

CHARLEY [*an arm on* BERNARD'S *shoulder*]: How do you like this kid? Gonna argue a case in front of the Supreme Court.

BERNARD [*protesting*]: Pop!

WILLY [*genuinely shocked, pained, and happy*]: No! The Supreme Court!

BERNARD: I gotta run. 'Bye, Dad!

CHARLEY: Knock 'em dead, Bernard!

[BERNARD *goes off.*]

WILLY [*as* CHARLEY *takes out his wallet*]: The Supreme Court! And he didn't even mention it!

CHARLEY [*counting out money on the desk*]: He don't have to—he's gonna do it.

WILLY: And you never told him what to do, did you? You never took any interest in him.

CHARLEY: My salvation is that I never took any interest in anything. There's some money—fifty dollars. I got an accountant inside.

WILLY: Charley, look . . . [*With difficulty*] I got my insurance to pay. If you can manage it—I need a hundred and ten dollars.

[CHARLEY *doesn't reply for a moment; merely stops moving.*]

WILLY: I'd draw it from my bank but Linda would know, and I . . .

CHARLEY: Sit down, Willy.

WILLY [*moving toward the chair*]: I'm keeping an account of everything, remember. I'll pay every penny back. [*He sits.*]

CHARLEY: Now listen to me, Willy.

WILLY: I want you to know I appreciate . . .

CHARLEY [*sitting down on the table*]: Willy, what're you doin'? What the hell is goin' on in your head?

WILLY: Why? I'm simply . . .

CHARLEY: I offered you a job. You can make fifty dollars a week. And I won't send you on the road.

WILLY: I've got a job.

CHARLEY: Without pay? What kind of a job is a job without pay? [*He rises.*] Now, look, kid, enough is enough. I'm no genius but I know when I'm being insulted.

WILLY: Insulted!

CHARLEY: Why don't you want to work for me?

WILLY: What's the matter with you? I've got a job.

CHARLEY: Then what're you walkin' in here every week for?

WILLY [*getting up*]: Well, if you don't want me to walk in here—

CHARLEY: I am offering you a job.

WILLY: I don't want your goddam job!

CHARLEY: When the hell are you going to grow up?

WILLY [*furiously*]: You big ignoramus, if you say that to me again I'll rap you one! I don't care how big you are! [*He's ready to fight.*]

[*Pause.*]

CHARLEY [*kindly, going to him*]: How much do you need, Willy?

WILLY: Charley, I'm strapped, I'm strapped. I don't know what to do. I was just fired.

CHARLEY: Howard fired you?

WILLY: That snotnose. Imagine that? I named him. I named him Howard.

CHARLEY: Willy, when're you gonna realize that them things don't mean anything? You named him Howard, but you can't sell that. The only thing you got in this world is what you can sell. And the funny thing is that you're a salesman, and you don't know that.

WILLY: I've always tried to think otherwise, I guess. I always felt that if a man was impressive, and well liked, that nothing—

CHARLEY: Why must everybody like you? Who liked J. P. Morgan? Was he impressive? In a Turkish bath he'd look like a butcher. But with his pockets on he was very well liked. Now listen, Willy, I know you don't like me, and nobody can say I'm in love with you, but I'll give you a job because—just for the hell of it, put it that way. Now what do you say?

WILLY: I—I just can't work for you, Charley.

CHARLEY: What're you, jealous of me?

WILLY: I can't work for you, that's all, don't ask me why.

CHARLEY [*angered, takes out more bills*]: You been jealous of me all your life, you damned fool! Here, pay your insurance. [*He puts the money in* WILLY'S *hand.*]

WILLY: I'm keeping strict accounts.

CHARLEY: I've got some work to do. Take care of yourself. And pay your insurance.

WILLY [*moving to the right*]: Funny, y'know? After all the highways, and the trains, and the appointments, and the years, you end up worth more dead than alive.

CHARLEY: Willy, nobody's worth nothin' dead. [*After a slight pause*] Did you hear what I said?

[WILLY *stands still, dreaming.*]

CHARLEY: Willy!

WILLY: Apologize to Bernard for me when you see him. I didn't mean to argue with him. He's a fine boy. They're all fine boys, and they'll end up big—all of them. Someday they'll all play tennis together. Wish me luck, Charley. He saw Bill Oliver today.

CHARLEY: Good luck.

WILLY [*on the verge of tears*]: Charley, you're the only friend I got. Isn't that a remarkable thing? [*He goes out.*]

CHARLEY: Jesus!

[CHARLEY *stares after him a moment and follows. All light blacks out. Suddenly raucous music is heard, and a red glow rises behind the screen at right.* STANLEY, *a young waiter, appears, carrying a table, followed by* HAPPY, *who is carrying two chairs.*]

STANLEY [*putting the table down*]: That's all right, Mr. Loman, I can handle it myself. [*He turns and takes the chairs from* HAPPY *and places them at the table.*]

HAPPY [*glancing around*]: Oh, this is better.

STANLEY: Sure, in the front there you're in the middle of all kinds a noise. Whenever you got a party, Mr. Loman, you just tell me and I'll put you back here. Y'know, there's a lotta people they don't like it private, because when they go out they like to see a lotta action around them because they're sick and tired to stay in the house by theirself. But I know you, you ain't from Hackensack. You know what I mean?

HAPPY [*sitting down*]: So how's it coming, Stanley?

STANLEY: Ah, it's a dog's life. I only wish during the war they'd a took me in the Army. I coulda been dead by now.

HAPPY: My brother's back, Stanley.

STANLEY: Oh, he come back, heh? From the Far West.

HAPPY: Yeah, big cattle man, my brother, so treat him right. And my father's coming too.

STANLEY: Oh, your father too!

HAPPY: You got a couple of nice lobsters?

STANLEY: Hundred percent, big.

HAPPY: I want them with the claws.

STANLEY: Don't worry, I don't give you no mice. [HAPPY *laughs.*] How about some wine? It'll put a head on the meal.

HAPPY: No. You remember, Stanley, that recipe I brought you from overseas? With the champagne in it?

STANLEY: Oh, yeah, sure. I still got it tacked up yet in the kitchen. But that'll have to cost a buck apiece anyways.

HAPPY: That's all right.

STANLEY: What'd you, hit a number or somethin'?

HAPPY: No, it's a little celebration. My brother is—I think he pulled off a big deal today. I think we're going into business together.

STANLEY: Great! That's the best for you. Because a family business, you know what I mean?—that's the best.

HAPPY: That's what I think.

STANLEY: 'Cause what's the difference? Somebody steals? It's in the family. Know what I mean? [*Sotto voce*] Like this bartender here. The boss is goin' crazy what kinda leak he's got in the cash register. You put it in but it don't come out.

HAPPY [*raising his head*]: Sh!

STANLEY: What?

HAPPY: You notice I wasn't lookin' right or left, was I?

STANLEY: No.

HAPPY: And my eyes are closed.

STANLEY: So what's the—?

HAPPY: Strudel's comin'.

STANLEY [*catching on, looks around*]: Ah, no, there's no—[*He breaks off as a furred, lavishly dressed girl enters and sits at the next table. Both follow her with their eyes.*]

STANLEY: Geez, how'd ya know?

HAPPY: I got radar or something. [*Staring directly at her profile*] Oooooooo . . . Stanley.

STANLEY: I think that's for you, Mr. Loman.

HAPPY: Look at that mouth. Oh, God. And the binoculars.

STANLEY: Geez, you got a life, Mr. Loman.

HAPPY: Wait on her.

STANLEY [*going to the girl's table*]: Would you like a menu, ma'am?

GIRL: I'm expecting someone, but I'd like a—

HAPPY: Why don't you bring her—excuse me, miss, do you mind? I sell champagne, and I'd like you to try my brand. Bring her a champagne, Stanley.

GIRL: That's awfully nice of you.

HAPPY: Don't mention it. It's all company money. [*He laughs.*]

GIRL: That's a charming product to be selling, isn't it?

HAPPY: Oh, gets to be like everything else. Selling is selling, y'know.

GIRL: I suppose.

HAPPY: You don't happen to sell, do you?

GIRL: No, I don't sell.

HAPPY: Would you object to a compliment from a stranger? You ought to be on a magazine cover.

GIRL [*looking at him a little archly*]: I have been.

[STANLEY *comes in with a glass of champagne.*]

HAPPY: What'd I say before, Stanley? You see? She's a cover girl.

STANLEY: Oh, I could see, I could see.

HAPPY [*to the* GIRL]: What magazine?

GIRL: Oh, a lot of them. [*She takes the drink.*] Thank you.

HAPPY: You know what they say in France, don't you? "Champagne is the

drink of the complexion"—Hya, Biff!

[BIFF *has entered and sits with* HAPPY.]

BIFF: Hello, kid. Sorry I'm late.

HAPPY: I just got here. Uh, Miss—?

GIRL: Forsythe.

HAPPY: Miss Forsythe, this is my brother.

BIFF: Is Dad here?

HAPPY: His name is Biff. You might've heard of him. Great football player.

GIRL: Really? What team?

HAPPY: Are you familiar with football?

GIRL: No, I'm afraid I'm not.

HAPPY: Biff is quarterback with the New York Giants.

GIRL: Well, that is nice, isn't it? [*She drinks.*]

HAPPY: Good health.

GIRL: I'm happy to meet you.

HAPPY: That's my name. Hap. It's really Harold, but at West Point they called me Happy.

GIRL [*now really impressed*]: Oh, I see. How do you do? [*She turns her profile.*]

BIFF: Isn't Dad coming?

HAPPY: You want her?

BIFF: Oh, I could never make that.

HAPPY: I remember the time that idea would never come into your head. Where's the old confidence, Biff?

BIFF: I just saw Oliver—

HAPPY: Wait a minute. I've got to see that old confidence again. Do you want her? She's on call.

BIFF: Oh, no. [*He turns to look at the* GIRL.]

HAPPY: I'm telling you. Watch this. [*Turning to the* GIRL] Honey? [*She turns to him.*] Are you busy?

GIRL: Well, I am . . . but I could make a phone call.

HAPPY: Do that, will you, honey? And see if you can get a friend. We'll be here for a while. Biff is one of the greatest football players in the country.

GIRL [*standing up*]: Well, I'm certainly happy to meet you.

HAPPY: Come back soon.

GIRL: I'll try.

HAPPY: Don't try, honey, try hard.

[*The* GIRL *exits.* STANLEY *follows, shaking his head in bewildered admiration.*]

HAPPY: Isn't that a shame now? A beautiful girl like that? That's why I can't get married. There's not a good woman in a thousand. New York is loaded with them, kid!

BIFF: Hap, look—

HAPPY: I told you she was on call!

BIFF [*strangely unnerved*]: Cut it out, will ya? I want to say something to you.

HAPPY: Did you see Oliver?

BIFF: I saw him all right. Now look, I want to tell Dad a couple of things and I want you to help me.

HAPPY: What? Is he going to back you?

BIFF: Are you crazy? You're out of your goddam head, you know that?

HAPPY: Why? What happened?

BIFF [*breathlessly*]: I did a terrible thing today, Hap. It's been the strangest day I ever went through. I'm all numb, I swear.

HAPPY: You mean he wouldn't see you?

BIFF: Well, I waited six hours for him, see? All day. Kept sending my name

in. Even tried to date his secretary so she'd get me to him, but no soap.

HAPPY: Because you're not showin' the old confidence, Biff. He remembered you, didn't he?

BIFF [*stopping* HAPPY *with a gesture*]: Finally, about five o'clock, he comes out. Didn't remember who I was or anything. I felt like such an idiot, Hap.

HAPPY: Did you tell him my Florida idea?

BIFF: He walked away. I saw him for one minute. I got so mad I could've torn the walls down! How the hell did I ever get the idea I was a salesman there? I even believed myself that I'd been a salesman for him! And then he gave me one look and—I realized what a ridiculous lie my whole life has been. We've been talking in a dream for fifteen years. I was a shipping clerk.

HAPPY: What'd you do?

BIFF [*with great tension and wonder*]: Well, he left, see. And the secretary went out. I was all alone in the waiting-room. I don't know what came over me, Hap. The next thing I know I'm in his office—paneled walls, everything. I can't explain it. I—Hap, I took his fountain pen.

HAPPY: Geez, did he catch you?

BIFF: I ran out. I ran down all eleven flights. I ran and ran and ran.

HAPPY: That was an awful dumb—what'd you do that for?

BIFF [*agonized*]: I don't know, I just—wanted to take something, I don't know. You gotta help me, Hap, I'm gonna tell Pop.

HAPPY: You crazy? What for?

BIFF: Hap, he's got to understand that I'm not the man somebody lends that kind of money to. He thinks I've been spiting him all these years and it's eating him up.

HAPPY: That's just it. You tell him something nice.

BIFF: I can't.

HAPPY: Say you got a lunch date with Oliver tomorrow.

BIFF: So what do I do tomorrow?

HAPPY: You leave the house tomorrow and come back at night and say

Oliver is thinking it over. And he thinks it over for a couple of weeks, and gradually it fades away and nobody's the worse.

BIFF: But it'll go on for ever!

HAPPY: Dad is never so happy as when he's looking forward to something!

[WILLY *enters.*]

HAPPY: Hello, scout!

WILLY: Gee, I haven't been here in years!

[STANLEY *has followed* WILLY *in and sets a chair for him.* STANLEY *starts off but* HAPPY *stops him.*]

HAPPY: Stanley!

[STANLEY *stands by, waiting for an order.*]

BIFF [*going to* WILLY *with guilt, as to an invalid*]: Sit down, Pop. You want a drink?

WILLY: Sure, I don't mind.

BIFF: Let's get a load on.

WILLY: You look worried.

BIFF: N-no. [*To* STANLEY] Scotch all around. Make it doubles.

STANLEY: Doubles, right. [*He goes.*]

WILLY: You had a couple already, didn't you?

BIFF: Just a couple, yeah.

WILLY: Well, what happened, boy? [*Nodding affirmatively, with a smile*] Everything go all right?

BIFF [*takes a breath, then reaches out and grasps* WILLY'S *hand*]: Pal . . . [*He is smiling bravely, and* WILLY *is smiling too.*] I had an experience today.

HAPPY: Terrific, Pop.

WILLY: That so? What happened?

BIFF [*high, slightly alcoholic, above the earth*]: I'm going to tell you everything from first to last. It's been a strange day. [*Silence. He looks around,*

composes himself as best he can, but his breath keeps breaking the rhythm of his voice.] I had to wait quite a while for him, and—

WILLY: Oliver?

BIFF: Yeah, Oliver. All day, as a matter of cold fact. And a lot of—instances —facts, Pop, facts about my life came back to me. Who was it, Pop? Who ever said I was a salesman with Oliver?

WILLY: Well, you were.

BIFF: No, Dad, I was a shipping clerk.

WILLY: But you were practically—

BIFF [*with determination*]: Dad, I don't know who said it first, but I was never a salesman for Bill Oliver.

WILLY: What're you talking about?

BIFF: Let's hold on to the facts tonight, Pop. We're not going to get anywhere bullin' around. I was a shipping clerk.

WILLY [*angrily*]: All right, now listen to me—

BIFF: Why don't you let me finish?

WILLY: I'm not interested in stories about the past or any crap of that kind because the woods are burning, boys, you understand? There's a big blaze going on all around. I was fired today.

BIFF [*shocked*]: How could you be?

WILLY: I was fired, and I'm looking for a little good news to tell your mother, because the woman has waited and the woman has suffered. The gist of it is that I haven't got a story left in my head, Biff. So don't give me a lecture about facts and aspects. I am not interested. Now what've you got to say to me?

[STANLEY *enters with three drinks. They wait until he leaves.*]

WILLY: Did you see Oliver?

BIFF: Jesus, Dad!

WILLY: You mean you didn't go up there?

HAPPY: Sure he went up there.

BIFF: I did. I—saw him. How could they fire you?

WILLY [*on the edge of his chair*]: What kind of a welcome did he give you?

BIFF: He won't even let you work on commission?

WILLY: I'm out! [*Driving*] So tell me, he gave you a warm welcome?

HAPPY: Sure, Pop, sure!

BIFF [*driven*]: Well, it was kind of—

WILLY: I was wondering if he'd remember you. [*To* HAPPY] Imagine, man doesn't see him for ten, twelve years and gives him that kind of a welcome!

HAPPY: Damn right!

BIFF [*trying to return to the offensive*]: Pop, look—

WILLY: You know why he remembered you, don't you? Because you impressed him in those days.

BIFF: Let's talk quietly and get this down to the facts, huh?

WILLY [*as though* BIFF *had been interrupting*]: Well, what happened? It's great news, Biff. Did he take you into his office or'd you talk in the waiting-room?

BIFF: Well, he came in, see, and—

WILLY [*with a big smile*]: What'd he say? Betcha he threw his arm around you.

BIFF: Well, he kinda—

WILLY: He's a fine man. [*To* HAPPY] Very hard man to see, y'know.

HAPPY [*agreeing*]: Oh, I know.

WILLY [*to* BIFF]: Is that where you had the drinks?

BIFF: Yeah, he gave me a couple of—no, no!

HAPPY [*cutting in*]: He told him my Florida idea.

WILLY: Don't interrupt. [*To* BIFF] How'd he react to the Florida idea?

BIFF: Dad, will you give me a minute to explain?

WILLY: I've been waiting for you to explain since I sat down here! What

happened? He took you into his office and what?

BIFF: Well—I talked. And—and he listened, see.

WILLY: Famous for the way he listens, y'know. What was his answer?

BIFF: His answer was—[*He breaks off, suddenly angry.*] Dad, you're not letting me tell you what I want to tell you!

WILLY [*accusing, angered*]: You didn't see him, did you?

BIFF: I did see him!

WILLY: What'd you insult him or something? You insulted him, didn't you?

BIFF: Listen, will you let me out of it, will you just let me out of it!

HAPPY: What the hell!

WILLY: Tell me what happened!

BIFF [*to* HAPPY]: I can't talk to him!

[*A single trumpet note jars the ear. The light of green leaves stains the house, which holds the air of night and a dream.* YOUNG BERNARD *enters and knocks on the door of the house.*]

YOUNG BERNARD [*frantically*]: Mrs. Loman, Mrs. Loman!

HAPPY: Tell him what happened!

BIFF [*to* HAPPY]: Shut up and leave me alone!

WILLY: No, no! You had to go and flunk math!

BIFF: What math? What're you talking about?

YOUNG BERNARD: Mrs. Loman, Mrs. Loman!

[LINDA *appears in the house, as of old.*]

WILLY [*wildly*]: Math, math, math!

BIFF: Take it easy, Pop!

YOUNG BERNARD: Mrs. Loman!

WILLY [*furiously*]: If you hadn't flunked you'd've been set by now!

BIFF: Now, look, I'm gonna tell you what happened, and you're going to

listen to me.

YOUNG BERNARD: Mrs. Loman!

BIFF: I waited six hours—

HAPPY: What the hell are you saying?

BIFF: I kept sending in my name but he wouldn't see me. So finally he . . . [*He continues unheard as light fades low on the restaurant.*]

YOUNG BERNARD: Biff flunked math!

LINDA: No!

YOUNG BERNARD: Birnbaum flunked him! They won't graduate him!

LINDA: But they have to. He's gotta go to the university. Where is he? Biff! Biff!

YOUNG BERNARD: No, he left. He went to Grand Central.

LINDA: Grand—You mean he went to Boston!

YOUNG BERNARD: Is Uncle Willy in Boston?

LINDA: Oh, maybe Willy can talk to the teacher. Oh, the poor, poor boy!

[*Light on house area snaps out.*]

BIFF [*at the table, now audible, holding up a gold fountain pen*]: . . . so I'm washed up with Oliver, you understand? Are you listening to me?

WILLY [*at a loss*]: Yeah, sure. If you hadn't flunked—

BIFF: Flunked what? What're you talking about?

WILLY: Don't blame everything on me! I didn't flunk math—you did! What pen?

HAPPY: That was awful dumb, Biff, a pen like that is worth—

WILLY [*seeing the pen for the first time*]: You took Oliver's pen?

BIFF [*weakening*]: Dad, I just explained it to you.

WILLY: You stole Bill Oliver's fountain pen!

BIFF: I didn't exactly steal it! That's just what I've been explaining to you!

HAPPY: He had it in his hand and just then Oliver walked in, so he got nervous and stuck it in his pocket!

WILLY: My God, Biff!

BIFF: I never intended to do it, Dad!

OPERATOR'S VOICE: Standish Arms, good evening!

WILLY [*shouting*]: I'm not in my room!

BIFF [*frightened*]: Dad, what's the matter? [*He and* HAPPY *stand up.*]

OPERATOR: Ringing Mr. Loman for you!

WILLY: I'm not there, stop it!

BIFF [*horrified, gets down on one knee before* WILLY]: Dad, I'll make good, I'll make good. [WILLY *tries to get to his feet.* BIFF *holds him down.*] Sit down now.

WILLY: No, you're no good, you're no good for anything.

BIFF: I am, Dad, I'll find something else, you understand? Now don't worry about anything. [*He holds up* WILLY'S *face.*] Talk to me, Dad.

OPERATOR: Mr. Loman does not answer. Shall I page him?

WILLY [*attempting to stand, as though to rush and silence the* OPERATOR]: No, no, no!

HAPPY: He'll strike something, Pop.

WILLY: No, no . . .

BIFF [*desperately, standing over* WILLY]: Pop, listen! Listen to me! I'm telling you something good. Oliver talked to his partner about the Florida idea. You listening? He—he talked to his partner, and he came to me . . . I'm going to be all right, you hear? Dad, listen to me, he said it was just a question of the amount!

WILLY: Then you . . . got it?

HAPPY: He's gonna be terrific, Pop!

WILLY [*trying to stand*]: Then you got it, haven't you? You got it! You got it!

BIFF [*agonized, holds* WILLY *down*]: No, no. Look, Pop. I'm supposed to have lunch with them tomorrow. I'm just telling you this so you'll know that I can still make an impression, Pop. And I'll make good somewhere, but I can't go tomorrow, see?

WILLY: Why not? You simply—

BIFF: But the pen, Pop!

WILLY: You give it to him and tell him it was an oversight!

HAPPY: Sure, have lunch tomorrow!

BIFF: I can't say that—

WILLY: You were doing a crossword puzzle and accidentally used his pen!

BIFF: Listen, kid, I took those balls years ago, now I walk in with his fountain pen? That clinches it, don't you see? I can't face him like that! I'll try elsewhere.

PAGE'S VOICE: Paging Mr. Loman!

WILLY: Don't you want to be anything?

BIFF: Pop, how can I go back?

WILLY: You don't want to be anything, is that what's behind it?

BIFF [*now angry at* WILLY *for not crediting his sympathy*]: Don't take it that way! You think it was easy walking into that office after what I'd done to him? A team of horses couldn't have dragged me back to Bill Oliver!

WILLY: Then why'd you go?

BIFF: Why did I go? Why did I go! Look at you! Look at what's become of you!

[*Off left,* THE WOMAN *laughs.*]

WILLY: Biff, you're going to go to that lunch tomorrow, or—

BIFF: I can't go. I've got no appointment!

HAPPY: Biff, for . . . !

WILLY: Are you spiting me?

BIFF: Don't take it that way! Goddammit!

WILLY [*strikes* BIFF *and falters away from the table*]: You rotten little louse! Are you spiting me?

THE WOMAN: Someone's at the door, Willy!

BIFF: I'm no good, can't you see what I am?

HAPPY [*separating them*]: Hey, you're in a restaurant! Now cut it out, both of you! [*The girls enter.*] Hello, girls, sit down.

[THE WOMAN *laughs, off left.*]

MISS FORSYTHE: I guess we might as well. This is Letta.

THE WOMAN: Willy, are you going to wake up?

BIFF [*ignoring* WILLY]: How're ya, miss, sit down. What do you drink?

MISS FORSYTHE: Letta might not be able to stay long.

LETTA: I gotta get up very early tomorrow. I got jury duty. I'm so excited! Were you fellows ever on a jury?

BIFF: No, but I been in front of them! [*The girls laugh.*] This is my father.

LETTA: Isn't he cute? Sit down with us, Pop.

HAPPY: Sit him down, Biff!

BIFF [*going to him*]: Come on, slugger, drink us under the table. To hell with it! Come on, sit down, pal.

[*On* BIFF'S *last insistence*, WILLY *is about to sit.*]

THE WOMAN [*now urgently*]: Willy, are you going to answer the door!

[THE WOMAN'S *call pulls* WILLY *back. He starts right, befuddled.*]

BIFF: Hey, where are you going?

WILLY: Open the door.

BIFF: The door?

WILLY: The washroom . . . the door . . . where's the door?

BIFF [*leading* WILLY *to the left*]: Just go straight down.

[WILLY *moves left.*]

THE WOMAN: Willy, Willy, are you going to get up, get up, get up, get up?

[WILLY *exits left.*]

LETTA: I think it's sweet you bring your daddy along.

MISS FORSYTHE: Oh, he isn't really your father!

BIFF [*at left, turning to her resentfully*]: Miss Forsythe, you've just seen a prince walk by. A fine, troubled prince. A hard-working, unappreciated prince. A pal, you understand? A good companion. Always for his boys.

LETTA: That's so sweet.

HAPPY: Well, girls, what's the program? We're wasting time. Come on, Biff. Gather round. Where would you like to go?

BIFF: Why don't you do something for him?

HAPPY: Me!

BIFF: Don't you give a damn for him, Hap?

HAPPY: What're you talking about? I'm the one who—

BIFF: I sense it, you don't give a good goddam about him. [*He takes the rolled-up hose from his pocket and puts it on the table in front of* HAPPY.] Look what I found in the cellar, for Christ's sake. How can you bear to let it go on?

HAPPY: Me? Who goes away? Who runs off and—

BIFF: Yeah, but he doesn't mean anything to you. You could help him—I can't. Don't you understand what I'm talking about? He's going to kill himself, don't you know that?

HAPPY: Don't I know it! Me!

BIFF: Hap, help him! Jesus . . . help him . . . Help me, help me, I can't bear to look at his face! [*Ready to weep, he hurries out, up right.*]

HAPPY [*starting after him*]: Where are you going?

MISS FORSYTHE: What's he so mad about?

HAPPY: Come on, girls, we'll catch up with him.

MISS FORSYTHE [*as* HAPPY *pushes her out*]: Say, I don't like that temper of his!

HAPPY: He's just a little overstrung, he'll be all right!

WILLY [*off left, as* THE WOMAN *laughs*]: Don't answer! Don't answer!

LETTA: Don't you want to tell your father—

HAPPY: No, that's not my father. He's just a guy. Come on, we'll catch Biff, and, honey, we're going to paint this town! Stanley, where's the check! Hey, Stanley!

[*They exit.* STANLEY *looks toward left.*]

STANLEY [*calling to* HAPPY *indignantly*]: Mr. Loman! Mr. Loman!

> [STANLEY *picks up a chair and follows them off. Knocking is heard off left.* THE WOMAN *enters, laughing.* WILLY *follows her. She is in a black slip; he is buttoning his shirt. Raw, sensuous music accompanies their speech.*]

WILLY: Will you stop laughing? Will you stop?

THE WOMAN: Aren't you going to answer the door? He'll wake the whole hotel.

WILLY: I'm not expecting anybody.

THE WOMAN: Whyn't you have another drink, honey, and stop being so damn self-centered?

WILLY: I'm so lonely.

THE WOMAN: You know you ruined me, Willy? From now on, whenever you come to the office, I'll see that you go right through to the buyers. No waiting at my desk any more, Willy. You ruined me.

WILLY: That's nice of you to say that.

THE WOMAN: Gee, you are self-centered! Why so sad? You are the saddest, self-centeredest soul I ever did see-saw. [*She laughs. He kisses her.*] Come on inside, drummer boy. It's silly to be dressing in the middle of the night. [*As knocking is heard*] Aren't you going to answer the door?

WILLY: They're knocking on the wrong door.

THE WOMAN: But I felt the knocking. And he heard us talking in here. Maybe the hotel's on fire!

WILLY [*his terror rising*]: It's a mistake.

THE WOMAN: Then tell him to go away!

WILLY: There's nobody there.

THE WOMAN: It's getting on my nerves, Willy. There's somebody standing out there and it's getting on my nerves!

WILLY [*pushing her away from him*]: All right, stay in the bathroom here, and don't come out. I think there's a law in Massachusetts about it, so don't come out. It may be that new room clerk. He looked very mean. So don't come out. It's a mistake, there's no fire.

> [*The knocking is heard again. He takes a few steps away from her, and she vanishes into the wing. The light follows him, and now he is facing* YOUNG BIFF, *who carries a suitcase.* BIFF *steps toward him. The music is gone.*]

BIFF: Why didn't you answer?

WILLY: Biff! What are you doing in Boston?

BIFF: Why didn't you answer? I've been knocking for five minutes, I called you on the phone—

WILLY: I just heard you. I was in the bathroom and had the door shut. Did anything happen home?

BIFF: Dad—I let you down.

WILLY: What do you mean?

BIFF: Dad . . .

WILLY: Biffo, what's this about? [*Putting his arm around* BIFF] Come on, let's go downstairs and get you a malted.

BIFF: Dad, I flunked math.

WILLY: Not for the term?

BIFF: The term. I haven't got enough credits to graduate.

WILLY: You mean to say Bernard wouldn't give you the answers?

BIFF: He did, he tried, but I only got a sixty-one.

WILLY: And they wouldn't give you four points?

BIFF: Birnbaum refused absolutely. I begged him, Pop, but he won't give me those points. You gotta talk to him before they close the school. Because if he saw the kind of man you are, and you just talked to him in your way, I'm sure he'd come through for me. The class came right before practice, see, and I didn't go enough. Would you talk to him? He'd like you, Pop. You know the way you could talk.

WILLY: You're on. We'll drive right back.

BIFF: Oh, Dad, good work! I'm sure he'll change it for you!

WILLY: Go downstairs and tell the clerk I'm checkin' out. Go right down.

BIFF: Yes, sir! See, the reason he hates me, Pop—one day he was late for class so I got up at the blackboard and imitated him. I crossed my eyes and talked with a lithp.

WILLY [*laughing*]: You did? The kids like it?

BIFF: They nearly died laughing!

WILLY: Yeah? What'd you do?

BIFF: The thquare root of thixthy twee is . . . [WILLY *bursts out laughing;* BIFF *joins him.*] And in the middle of it he walked in!

[WILLY *laughs and* THE WOMAN *joins in offstage.*]

WILLY [*without hesitation*]: Hurry downstairs and—

BIFF: Somebody in there?

WILLY: No, that was next door.

[THE WOMAN *laughs offstage.*]

BIFF: Somebody got in your bathroom!

WILLY: No, it's the next room, there's a party—

THE WOMAN [*enters, laughing. She lisps this*]: Can I come in? There's something in the bathtub, Willy, and it's moving!

[WILLY *looks at* BIFF, *who is staring open-mouthed and horrified at* THE WOMAN.]

WILLY: Ah—you better go back to your room. They must be finished painting by now. They're painting her room so I let her take a shower here. Go back, go back . . . [*He pushes her.*]

THE WOMAN [*resisting*]: But I've got to get dressed, Willy, I can't—

WILLY: Get out of here! Go back, go back . . . [*Suddenly striving for the ordinary*] This is Miss Francis, Biff, she's a buyer. They're painting her room. Go back, Miss Francis, go back . . .

THE WOMAN: But my clothes, I can't go out naked in the hall!

WILLY [*pushing her offstage*]: Get outa here! Go back, go back!

[BIFF *slowly sits down on his suitcase as the argument continues offstage.*]

THE WOMAN: Where's my stockings? You promised me stockings, Willy!

WILLY: I have no stockings here!

THE WOMAN: You had two boxes of size nine sheers for me, and I want them!

WILLY: Here, for God's sake, will you get outa here!

THE WOMAN [*enters holding a box of stockings*]: I just hope there's nobody in the hall. That's all I hope. [*To* BIFF] Are you football or baseball?

BIFF: Football.

THE WOMAN [*angry, humiliated*]: That's me too. G'night. [*She snatches her clothes from* WILLY, *and walks out.*]

WILLY [*after a pause*]: Well, better get going. I want to get to the school first thing in the morning. Get my suits out of the closet. I'll get my valise. [BIFF *doesn't move.*] What's the matter? [BIFF *remains motionless, tears falling.*] She's a buyer. Buys for J. H. Simmons. She lives down the hall—they're painting. You don't imagine—[*He breaks off. After a pause*] Now listen, pal, she's just a buyer. She sees merchandise in her room and they have to keep it looking just so . . . [*Pause. Assuming command*] All right, get my suits. [BIFF *doesn't move.*] Now stop crying and do as I say. I gave you an order. Biff, I gave you an order! Is that what you do when I give you an order? How dare you cry? [*Putting his arm around* BIFF] Now look, Biff, when you grow up you'll understand about these things. You mustn't—you mustn't overemphasize a thing

like this. I'll see Birnbaum first thing in the morning.

BIFF: Never mind.

WILLY [*getting down beside* BIFF]: Never mind! He's going to give you those points. I'll see to it.

BIFF: He wouldn't listen to you.

WILLY: He certainly will listen to me. You need those points for the U. of Virginia.

BIFF: I'm not going there.

WILLY: Heh? If I can't get him to change that mark you'll make it up in summer school. You've got all summer to—

BIFF [*his weeping breaking from him*]: Dad . . .

WILLY [*infected by it*]: Oh, my boy . . .

BIFF: Dad . . .

WILLY: She's nothing to me, Biff. I was lonely, I was terribly lonely.

BIFF: You—you gave her Mama's stockings! [*His tears break through and he rises to go.*]

WILLY [*grabbing for* BIFF]: I gave you an order!

BIFF: Don't touch me, you—liar!

WILLY: Apologize for that!

BIFF: You fake! You phony little fake! You fake! [*Overcome, he turns quickly and weeping fully goes out with his suitcase.* WILLY *is left on the floor on his knees.*]

WILLY: I gave you an order! Biff, come back here or I'll beat you! Come back here! I'll whip you!

[STANLEY *comes quickly in from the right and stands in front of* WILLY.]

WILLY [*shouts at* STANLEY]: I gave you an order . . .

STANLEY: Hey, let's pick it up, pick it up, Mr. Loman. [*He helps* WILLY *to his feet.*] Your boys left with the chippies. They said they'll see you home.

[*A second waiter watches some distance away.*]

WILLY: But we were supposed to have dinner together.

[*Music is heard,* WILLY'S *theme.*]

STANLEY: Can you make it?

WILLY: I'll—sure, I can make it. [*Suddenly concerned about his clothes.*] Do I—I look all right?

STANLEY: Sure, you look all right. [*He flicks a speck off* WILLY'S *lapel.*]

WILLY: Here—here's a dollar.

STANLEY: Oh, your son paid me. It's all right.

WILLY [*putting it in* STANLEY'S *hand*]: No, take it. You're a good boy.

STANLEY: Oh, no, you don't have to . . .

WILLY: Here—here's some more. I don't need it any more. [*After a slight pause*] Tell me—is there a seed store in the neighborhood?

STANLEY: Seeds? You mean like to plant?

[*As* WILLY *turns,* STANLEY *slips the money back into his jacket pocket.*]

WILLY: Yes. Carrots, peas . . .

STANLEY: Well, there's hardware stores on Sixth Avenue, but it may be too late now.

WILLY [*anxiously*]: Oh, I'd better hurry. I've got to get some seeds. [*He starts off to the right.*] I've got to get some seeds, right away. Nothing's planted. I don't have a thing in the ground.

[WILLY *hurries out as the light goes down.* STANLEY *moves over to the right after him, watches him off. The other waiter has been staring at* WILLY.]

STANLEY [*to the waiter*]: Well, whatta you looking at?

[*The waiter picks up the chairs and moves off right.* STANLEY *takes the table and follows him. The light fades on this area. There is a long pause, the sound of the flute coming over. The light gradually rises on the kitchen, which is empty.* HAPPY *appears at the door of the house,*

followed by BIFF. HAPPY *is carrying a large bunch of long-stemmed roses. He enters the kitchen, looks around for* LINDA. *Not seeing her, he turns to* BIFF, *who is just outside the house door, and makes a gesture with his hands, indicating "Not here, I guess." He looks into the living-room and freezes. Inside,* LINDA, *unseen, is seated,* WILLY'S *coat on her lap. She rises ominously and quietly and moves toward* HAPPY, *who backs up into the kitchen, afraid.*]

HAPPY: Hey, what're you doing up? [LINDA *says nothing but moves toward him implacably.*] Where's Pop? [*He keeps backing to the right, and now* LINDA *is in full view in the doorway to the living-room.*] Is he sleeping?

LINDA: Where were you?

HAPPY [*trying to laugh it off*]: We met two girls, Mom, very fine types. Here, we brought you some flowers. [*Offering them to her*] Put them in your room, Ma.

[*She knocks them to the floor at* BIFF'S *feet. He has now come inside and closed the door behind him. She stares at* BIFF, *silent.*]

HAPPY: Now what'd you do that for? Mom, I want you to have some flowers —

LINDA [*cutting* HAPPY *off, violently to* BIFF]: Don't you care whether he lives or dies?

HAPPY [*going to the stairs*]: Come upstairs, Biff.

BIFF [*with a flare of disgust, to* HAPPY]: Go away from me! [*To* LINDA] What do you mean, lives or dies? Nobody's dying around here, pal.

LINDA: Get out of my sight! Get out of here!

BIFF: I wanna see the boss.

LINDA: You're not going near him!

BIFF: Where is he? [*He moves into the living-room and* LINDA *follows.*]

LINDA [*shouting after* BIFF]: You invite him to dinner. He looks forward to it all day—[BIFF *appears in his parents' bedroom, looks around, and exits*]—and then you desert him there. There's no stranger you'd do that to!

HAPPY: Why? He had a swell time with us. Listen, when I—[LINDA *comes*

back into the kitchen]—desert him I hope I don't outlive the day!

LINDA: Get out of here!

HAPPY: Now look, Mom . . .

LINDA: Did you have to go to women tonight? You and your lousy rotten whores!

[BIFF *reenters the kitchen.*]

HAPPY: Mom, all we did was follow Biff around trying to cheer him up! [*To* BIFF] Boy, what a night you gave me!

LINDA: Get out of here, both of you, and don't come back! I don't want you tormenting him any more. Go on now, get your things together! [*To* BIFF] You can sleep in his apartment. [*She starts to pick up the flowers and stops herself.*] Pick up this stuff, I'm not your maid any more. Pick it up, you bum, you!

> [HAPPY *turns his back to her in refusal.* BIFF *slowly moves over and gets down on his knees, picking up the flowers.*]

LINDA: You're a pair of animals! Not one, not another living soul would have had the cruelty to walk out on that man in a restaurant!

BIFF [*not looking at her*]: Is that what he said?

LINDA: He didn't have to say anything. He was so humiliated he nearly limped when he came in.

HAPPY: But, Mom, he had a great time with us—

BIFF [*cutting him off violently*]: Shut up!

[*Without another word,* HAPPY *goes upstairs.*]

LINDA: You! You didn't even go in to see if he was all right!

BIFF [*still on the floor in front of* LINDA, *the flowers in his hand; with self-loathing*]: No. Didn't. Didn't do a damned thing. How do you like that, heh? Left him babbling in a toilet.

LINDA: You louse. You . . .

BIFF: Now you hit it on the nose! [*He gets up, throws the flowers in the wastebasket.*] The scum of the earth, and you're looking at him!

LINDA: Get out of here!

BIFF: I gotta talk to the boss, Mom. Where is he?

LINDA: You're not going near him. Get out of this house!

BIFF [*with absolute assurance, determination*]: No. We're gonna have an abrupt conversation, him and me.

LINDA: You're not talking to him!

[*Hammering is heard from outside the house, off right.* BIFF *turns toward the noise.*]

LINDA [*suddenly pleading*]: Will you please leave him alone? BIFF: What's he doing out there?

LINDA: He's planting the garden!

BIFF [*quietly*]: Now? Oh, my God!

[BIFF *moves outside,* LINDA *following. The light dies down on them and comes up on the center of the apron as* WILLY *walks into it. He is carrying a flashlight, a hoe, and a handful of seed packets. He raps the top of the hoe sharply to fix it firmly, and then moves to the left, measuring off the distance with his foot. He holds the flashlight to look at the seed packets, reading off the instructions. He is in the blue of night.*]

WILLY: Carrots . . . quarter-inch apart. Rows . . . one-foot rows. [*He measures it off.*] One foot. [*He puts down a package and measures off.*] Beets. [*He puts down another package and measures again.*] Lettuce. [*He reads the package, puts it down.*] One foot—[*He breaks off as* BEN *appears at the right and moves slowly down to him.*] What a proposition, ts, ts. Terrific, terrific. 'Cause she's suffered, Ben, the woman has suffered. You understand me? A man can't go out the way he came in, Ben, a man has got to add up to something. You can't, you can't—[BEN *moves toward him as though to interrupt.*] You gotta consider, now. Don't answer so quick. Remember, it's a guaranteed twenty-thousand-dollar proposition. Now look, Ben, I want you to go through the ins and outs of this thing with me. I've got nobody to talk to, Ben, and the woman has suffered, you hear me?

BEN [*standing still, considering*]: What's the proposition?

WILLY: It's twenty thousand dollars on the barrelhead. Guaranteed, gilt-edged, you understand?

BEN: You don't want to make a fool of yourself. They might not honor the policy.

WILLY: How can they dare refuse? Didn't I work like a coolie to meet every premium on the nose? And now they don't pay off ? Impossible!

BEN: It's called a cowardly thing, William.

WILLY: Why? Does it take more guts to stand here the rest of my life ringing up a zero?

BEN [*yielding*]: That's a point, William. [*He moves, thinking, turns.*] And twenty thousand—that *is* something one can feel with the hand, it is there.

WILLY [*now assured, with rising power*]: Oh, Ben, that's the whole beauty of it! I see it like a diamond, shining in the dark, hard and rough, that I can pick up and touch in my hand. Not like—like an appointment! This would not be another damned-fool appointment, Ben, and it changes all the aspects. Because he thinks I'm nothing, see, and so he spites me. But the funeral—[*Straightening up*] Ben, that funeral will be massive! They'll come from Maine, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire! All the old-timers with the strange license plates—that boy will be thunderstruck, Ben, because he never realized—I am known! Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey—I am known, Ben, and he'll see it with his eyes once and for all. He'll see what I am, Ben! He's in for a shock, that boy!

BEN [*coming down to the edge of the garden*]: He'll call you a coward.

WILLY [*suddenly fearful*]: No, that would be terrible.

BEN: Yes. And a damned fool.

WILLY: No, no, he mustn't, I won't have that! [*He is broken and desperate.*]

BEN: He'll hate you, William.

[*The gay music of the boys is heard.*]

WILLY: Oh, Ben, how do we get back to all the great times? Used to be so full of light, and comradeship, the sleigh-riding in winter, and the ruddiness on his cheeks. And always some kind of good news coming up, always something nice coming up ahead. And never even let me carry the valises in the house, and simonizing, simonizing that little red car! Why, why can't I give him something and not have him hate me?

BEN: Let me think about it. [*He glances at his watch.*] I still have a little time.

Remarkable proposition, but you've got to be sure you're not making a fool of yourself.

[BEN *drifts off upstage and goes out of sight.* BIFF *comes down from the left.*]

WILLY [*suddenly conscious of* BIFF, *turns and looks up at him, then begins picking up the packages of seeds in confusion*]: Where the hell is that seed? [*Indignantly*] You can't see nothing out here! They boxed in the whole goddam neighborhood!

BIFF: There are people all around here. Don't you realize that?

WILLY: I'm busy. Don't bother me.

BIFF [*taking the hoe from* WILLY]: I'm saying good-bye to you, Pop. [WILLY *looks at him, silent, unable to move.*] I'm not coming back any more.

WILLY: You're not going to see Oliver tomorrow?

BIFF: I've got no appointment, Dad.

WILLY: He put his arm around you, and you've got no appointment?

BIFF: Pop, get this now, will you? Everytime I've left it's been a fight that sent me out of here. Today I realized something about myself and I tried to explain it to you and I—I think I'm just not smart enough to make any sense out of it for you. To hell with whose fault it is or anything like that. [*He takes* WILLY'S *arm.*] Let's just wrap it up, heh? Come on in, we'll tell Mom. [*He gently tries to pull* WILLY *to left.*]

WILLY [*frozen, immobile, with guilt in his voice*]: No, I don't want to see her.

BIFF: Come on! [*He pulls again, and* WILLY *tries to pull away.*]

WILLY [*highly nervous*]: No, no, I don't want to see her.

BIFF [*tries to look into* WILLY'S *face, as if to find the answer there*]: Why don't you want to see her?

WILLY [*more harshly now*]: Don't bother me, will you?

BIFF: What do you mean, you don't want to see her? You don't want them calling you yellow, do you? This isn't your fault; it's me, I'm a bum. Now come inside! [WILLY *strains to get away.*] Did you hear what I said to you?

[WILLY *pulls away and quickly goes by himself into the house.* BIFF *follows.*]

LINDA [*to* WILLY]: Did you plant, dear?

BIFF [*at the door, to* LINDA]: All right, we had it out. I'm going and I'm not writing any more.

LINDA [*going to* WILLY *in the kitchen*]: I think that's the best way, dear. 'Cause there's no use drawing it out, you'll just never get along.

[WILLY *doesn't respond.*]

BIFF: People ask where I am and what I'm doing, you don't know, and you don't care. That way it'll be off your mind and you can start brightening up again. All right? That clears it, doesn't it? [WILLY *is silent, and* BIFF *goes to him.*] You gonna wish me luck, scout? [*He extends his hand*] What do you say?

LINDA: Shake his hand, Willy.

WILLY [*turning to her, seething with hurt*]: There's no necessity to mention the pen at all, y'know.

BIFF [*gently*]: I've got no appointment, Dad.

WILLY [*erupting fiercely*]: He put his arm around . . . ?

BIFF: Dad, you're never going to see what I am, so what's the use of arguing? If I strike oil I'll send you a check. Meantime forget I'm alive.

WILLY [*to* LINDA]: Spite, see?

BIFF: Shake hands, Dad.

WILLY: Not my hand.

BIFF: I was hoping not to go this way.

WILLY: Well, this is the way you're going. Good-bye.

[BIFF *looks at him a moment, then turns sharply and goes to the stairs.*]

WILLY [*stops him with*]: May you rot in hell if you leave this house!

BIFF [*turning*]: Exactly what is it that you want from me?

WILLY: I want you to know, on the train, in the mountains, in the valleys, wherever you go, that you cut down your life for spite!

BIFF: No, no.

WILLY: Spite, spite, is the word of your undoing! And when you're down and out, remember what did it. When you're rotting somewhere beside the railroad tracks, remember, and don't you dare blame it on me!

BIFF: I'm not blaming it on you!

WILLY: I won't take the rap for this, you hear?

[HAPPY *comes down the stairs and stands on the bottom step, watching.*]

BIFF: That's just what I'm telling you!

WILLY [*sinking into a chair at the table, with full accusation*]: You're trying to put a knife in me—don't think I don't know what you're doing!

BIFF: All right, phony! Then let's lay it on the line. [*He whips the rubber tube out of his pocket and puts it on the table.*]

HAPPY: You crazy—

LINDA: Biff! [*She moves to grab the hose, but* BIFF *holds it down with his hand.*]

BIFF: Leave it there! Don't move it!

WILLY [*not looking at it*]: What is that?

BIFF: You know goddam well what that is.

WILLY [*caged, wanting to escape*]: I never saw that.

BIFF: You saw it. The mice didn't bring it into the cellar! What is this supposed to do, make a hero out of you? This supposed to make me sorry for you?

WILLY: Never heard of it.

BIFF: There'll be no pity for you, you hear it? No pity!

WILLY [*to* LINDA]: You hear the spite!

BIFF: No, you're going to hear the truth—what you are and what I am!

LINDA: Stop it!

WILLY: Spite!

HAPPY [*coming down toward* BIFF]: You cut it now!

BIFF [*to* HAPPY]: The man don't know who we are! The man is gonna know! [*To* WILLY] We never told the truth for ten minutes in this house!

HAPPY: We always told the truth!

BIFF [*turning on him*]: You big blow, are you the assistant buyer? You're one of the two assistants to the assistant, aren't you?

HAPPY: Well, I'm practically—

BIFF: You're practically full of it! We all are! And I'm through with it. [*To* WILLY] Now hear this, Willy, this is me.

WILLY: I know you!

BIFF: You know why I had no address for three months? I stole a suit in Kansas City and I was in jail. [*To* LINDA, *who is sobbing*] Stop crying. I'm through with it.

[LINDA *turns away from them, her hands covering her face.*]

WILLY: I suppose that's my fault!

BIFF: I stole myself out of every good job since high school!

WILLY: And whose fault is that?

BIFF: And I never got anywhere because you blew me so full of hot air I could never stand taking orders from anybody! That's whose fault it is!

WILLY: I hear that!

LINDA: Don't, Biff!

BIFF: It's goddam time you heard that! I had to be boss big shot in two weeks, and I'm through with it!

WILLY: Then hang yourself! For spite, hang yourself!

BIFF: No! Nobody's hanging himself, Willy! I ran down eleven flights with a pen in my hand today. And suddenly I stopped, you hear me? And in the middle of that office building, do you hear this? I stopped in the middle of that building and I saw—the sky. I saw the things that I love in this world. The work and the food and time to sit and smoke. And I looked at the pen and said to myself, what the hell am I grabbing this for? Why am I trying to become what I don't want to

be? What am I doing in an office, making a contemptuous, begging fool of myself, when all I want is out there, waiting for me the minute I say I know who I am! Why can't I say that, Willy? [*He tries to make* WILLY *face him, but* WILLY *pulls away and moves to the left.*]

WILLY [*with hatred, threateningly*]: The door of your life is wide open!

BIFF: Pop! I'm a dime a dozen, and so are you!

WILLY [*turning on him now in an uncontrolled outburst*]: I am not a dime a dozen! I am Willy Loman, and you are Biff Loman!

[BIFF *starts for* WILLY, *but is blocked by* HAPPY. *In his fury,* BIFF *seems on the verge of attacking his father.*]

BIFF: I am not a leader of men, Willy, and neither are you. You were never anything but a hard-working drummer who landed in the ash can like all the rest of them! I'm one dollar an hour, Willy! I tried seven states and couldn't raise it. A buck an hour! Do you gather my meaning? I'm not bringing home any prizes any more, and you're going to stop waiting for me to bring them home!

WILLY [*directly to* BIFF]: You vengeful, spiteful mut!

[BIFF *breaks from* HAPPY. WILLY, *in fright, starts up the stairs.* BIFF *grabs him.*]

BIFF [*at the peak of his fury*]: Pop, I'm nothing! I'm nothing, Pop. Can't you understand that? There's no spite in it any more. I'm just what I am, that's all.

[BIFF'S *fury has spent itself, and he breaks down, sobbing, holding on to* WILLY, *who dumbly fumbles for* BIFF'S *face.*]

WILLY [*astonished*]: What're you doing? What're you doing? [*To* LINDA] Why is he crying?

BIFF [*crying, broken*]: Will you let me go, for Christ's sake? Will you take that phony dream and burn it before something happens? [*Struggling to contain himself, he pulls away and moves to the stairs.*] I'll go in the morning. Put him—put him to bed. [*Exhausted,* BIFF *moves up the stairs to his room.*]

WILLY [*after a long pause, astonished, elevated*]: Isn't that—isn't that remarkable? Biff—he likes me!

LINDA: He loves you, Willy!

HAPPY [*deeply moved*]: Always did, Pop.

WILLY: Oh, Biff! [*Staring wildly*] He cried! Cried to me. [*He is choking with his love, and now cries out his promise.*] That boy—that boy is going to be magnificent!

[BEN *appears in the light just outside the kitchen.*]

BEN: Yes, outstanding, with twenty thousand behind him.

LINDA [*sensing the racing of his mind, fearfully, carefully*]: Now come to bed, Willy. It's all settled now.

WILLY [*finding it difficult not to rush out of the house*]: Yes, we'll sleep. Come on. Go to sleep, Hap.

BEN: And it does take a great kind of a man to crack the jungle.

[*In accents of dread,* BEN'S *idyllic music starts up.*]

HAPPY [*his arm around* LINDA]: I'm getting married, Pop, don't forget it. I'm changing everything. I'm gonna run that department before the year is up. You'll see, Mom. [*He kisses her.*]

BEN: The jungle is dark but full of diamonds, Willy.

[WILLY *turns, moves, listening to* BEN.]

LINDA: Be good. You're both good boys, just act that way, that's all.

HAPPY: 'Night, Pop. [*He goes upstairs.*]

LINDA [*to* WILLY]: Come, dear.

BEN [*with greater force*]: One must go in to fetch a diamond out.

WILLY [*to* LINDA, *as he moves slowly along the edge of the kitchen, toward the door*]: I just want to get settled down, Linda. Let me sit alone for a little.

LINDA [*almost uttering her fear*]: I want you upstairs.

WILLY [*taking her in his arms*]: In a few minutes, Linda. I couldn't sleep right now. Go on, you look awful tired. [*He kisses her.*]

BEN: Not like an appointment at all. A diamond is rough and hard to the touch.

WILLY: Go on now. I'll be right up.

LINDA: I think this is the only way, Willy.

WILLY: Sure, it's the best thing.

BEN: Best thing!

WILLY: The only way. Everything is gonna be—go on, kid, get to bed. You look so tired.

LINDA: Come right up.

WILLY: Two minutes.

[LINDA *goes into the living-room, then reappears in her bedroom.* WILLY *moves just outside the kitchen door.*]

WILLY: Loves me. [*Wonderingly*] Always loved me. Isn't that a remarkable thing? Ben, he'll worship me for it!

BEN [*with promise*]: It's dark there, but full of diamonds.

WILLY: Can you imagine that magnificence with twenty thousand dollars in his pocket?

LINDA [*calling from her room*]: Willy! Come up!

WILLY [*calling into the kitchen*]: Yes! Yes. Coming! It's very smart, you realize that, don't you, sweetheart? Even Ben sees it. I gotta go, baby. 'Bye! 'Bye! [*Going over to* BEN, *almost dancing*] Imagine? When the mail comes he'll be ahead of Bernard again!

BEN: A perfect proposition all around.

WILLY: Did you see how he cried to me? Oh, if I could kiss him, Ben!

BEN: Time, William, time!

WILLY: Oh, Ben, I always knew one way or another we were gonna make it, Biff and I!

BEN [*looking at his watch*]: The boat. We'll be late. [*He moves slowly off into the darkness.*]

WILLY [*elegiacally, turning to the house*]: Now when you kick off, boy, I want a seventy-yard boot, and get right down the field under the ball, and when you hit, hit low and hit hard, because it's important, boy. [*He swings around and faces the audience.*] There's all kinds of important people in the stands, and the

first thing you know . . . [*Suddenly realizing he is alone*] Ben! Ben, where do I . . . ? [*He makes a sudden movement of search.*] Ben, how do I . . . ?

LINDA [*calling*]: Willy, you coming up?

WILLY [*uttering a gasp of fear, whirling about as if to quiet her*]: Sh! [*He turns around as if to find his way; sounds, faces, voices seem to be swarming in upon him and he flicks at them, crying,* "Sh! Sh!" *Suddenly music, faint and high, stops him. It rises in intensity, almost to an unbearable scream. He goes up and down on his toes, and rushes off around the house.*] Shhh!

LINDA: Willy?

[*There is no answer.* LINDA *waits.* BIFF *gets up off his bed. He is still in his clothes.* HAPPY *sits up.* BIFF *stands listening.*]

LINDA [*with real fear*]: Willy, answer me! Willy!

[*There is the sound of a car starting and moving away at full speed.*]

LINDA: No!

BIFF [*rushing down the stairs*]: Pop!

[*As the car speeds off, the music crashes down in a frenzy of sound, which becomes the soft pulsation of a single cello string.* BIFF *slowly returns to his bedroom. He and* HAPPY *gravely don their jackets.* LINDA *slowly walks out of her room. The music has developed into a dead march. The leaves of day are appearing over everything.* CHARLEY *and* BERNARD, *somberly dressed, appear and knock on the kitchen door.* BIFF *and* HAPPY *slowly descend the stairs to the kitchen as* CHARLEY *and* BERNARD *enter. All stop a moment when* LINDA, *in clothes of mourning, bearing a little bunch of roses, comes through the draped doorway into the kitchen. She goes to* CHARLEY *and takes his arm. Now all move toward the audience, through the wall-line of the kitchen. At the limit of the apron,* LINDA *lays down the flowers, kneels, and sits back on her heels. All stare down at the grave.*]

CHARLEY: It's getting dark, Linda.

[LINDA *doesn't react. She stares at the grave.*]

BIFF: How about it, Mom? Better get some rest, heh? They'll be closing the gate soon.

[LINDA *makes no move. Pause.*]

HAPPY [*deeply angered*]: He had no right to do that. There was no necessity for it. We would've helped him.

CHARLEY [*grunting*]: Hmmm.

BIFF: Come along, Mom.

LINDA: Why didn't anybody come?

CHARLEY: It was a very nice funeral.

LINDA: But where are all the people he knew? Maybe they blame him.

CHARLEY: Naa. It's a rough world, Linda. They wouldn't blame him.

LINDA: I can't understand it. At this time especially. First time in thirty-five years we were just about free and clear. He only needed a little salary. He was even finished with the dentist.

CHARLEY: No man only needs a little salary.

LINDA: I can't understand it.

BIFF: There were a lot of nice days. When he'd come home from a trip; or on Sundays, making the stoop; finishing the cellar; putting on the new porch; when he built the extra bathroom; and put up the garage. You know something, Charley, there's more of him in that front stoop than in all the sales he ever made.

CHARLEY: Yeah. He was a happy man with a batch of cement.

LINDA: He was so wonderful with his hands.

BIFF: He had the wrong dreams. All, all, wrong.

HAPPY [*almost ready to fight* BIFF]: Don't say that!

BIFF: He never knew who he was.

CHARLEY [*stopping* HAPPY'S *movement and reply. To* BIFF]: Nobody dast blame this man. You don't understand: Willy was a salesman. And for a salesman, there is no rock bottom to the life. He don't put a bolt to a nut, he don't tell you the law or give you medicine. He's a man way out there in the blue, riding on a smile and a shoeshine. And when they start not smiling back—

that's an earthquake. And then you get yourself a couple of spots on your hat, and you're finished. Nobody dast blame this man. A salesman is got to dream, boy. It comes with the territory.

BIFF: Charley, the man didn't know who he was.

HAPPY [*infuriated*]: Don't say that!

BIFF: Why don't you come with me, Happy?

HAPPY: I'm not licked that easily. I'm staying right in this city, and I'm gonna beat this racket! [*He looks at* BIFF, *his chin set.*] The Loman Brothers!

BIFF: I know who I am, kid.

HAPPY: All right, boy. I'm gonna show you and everybody else that Willy Loman did not die in vain. He had a good dream. It's the only dream you can have—to come out number-one man. He fought it out here, and this is where I'm gonna win it for him.

BIFF [*with a hopeless glance at* HAPPY, *bends toward his mother*]: Let's go, Mom.

LINDA: I'll be with you in a minute. Go on, Charley. [*He hesitates.*] I want to, just for a minute. I never had a chance to say good-bye.

> [CHARLEY *moves away, followed by* HAPPY. BIFF *remains a slight distance up and left of* LINDA. *She sits there, summoning herself. The flute begins, not far away, playing behind her speech.*]

LINDA: Forgive me, dear. I can't cry. I don't know what it is, but I can't cry. I don't understand it. Why did you ever do that? Help me, Willy, I can't cry. It seems to me that you're just on another trip. I keep expecting you. Willy, dear, I can't cry. Why did you do it? I search and search and I search, and I can't understand it, Willy. I made the last payment on the house today. Today, dear. And there'll be nobody home. [*A sob rises in her throat.*] We're free and clear. [*Sobbing more fully, released*] We're free. [BIFF *comes slowly toward her.*] We're free . . . We're free . . .

> [BIFF *lifts her to her feet and moves out up right with her in his arms.* LINDA *sobs quietly.* BERNARD *and* CHARLEY *come together and follow them, followed by* HAPPY. *Only the music of the flute is left on the darkening stage as over the house the hard towers of the apartment buildings rise into sharp focus.*]

CURTAIN

Personal Background

Arthur Miller was born in Harlem on October 17, 1915, the son of Polish immigrants, Isidore and Augusta Miller. Miller's father had established
a successful clothing store upon coming to America, so the family enjoyed wealth; however, this prosperity ended with the Wall Street Crash of 1929. Financial hardship compelled the Miller family to move to Brooklyn in 1929.

Miller graduated from high school in New York in 1933. He applied to Cornell University and the University of Michigan, but both schools refused him admission. Miller worked a variety of odd jobs—including as a host of a radio program—before the University of Michigan accepted him. At school, he studied journalism, became the night editor of the *Michigan Daily*, and began experimenting with theater. In addition to hosting a radio program, Miller held a variety of jobs during his early career. After he left the University of Michigan, Miller wrote plays for the Federal Theatre in 1939. The Federal Theatre provided work for unemployed writers, actors, directors, and designers. Congress closed the Federal Theatre late in 1939.

Career Highlights

Miller's prolific writing career spans a period of over 60 years. During this time, Miller has written 26 plays, a novel entitled *Focus* (1945), several travel journals, a collection of short stories entitled *I Don't Need You Anymore* (1967), and an autobiography entitled *Timebends: A Life* (1987). Miller's plays generally address social issues and center around an individual in a social dilemma or an individual at the mercy of society. Miller's first play, *No Villain*, produced in 1936, explores Marxist theory and inner conflict through an individual facing ruin as a result of a strike. *Honors at Dawn* (1937) also centers around a strike and contrasting views of the economy but focuses on an individual's inability to express himself. *The Great Disobedience* (1938) makes a connection between the prison system and capitalism. *The Golden Years* (1940) tells the story of Cortes despoiling Mexico, as well as the effects of capitalism and fate on the individual.

Miller produced two radio plays in 1941: *The Pussycat and the Expert Plumber Who Was a Man*, and *William Ireland's Confession*. Miller's third radio play, *The Four Freedoms*, was produced in 1942.

The Man Who Had All the Luck (1944) revolves around a person who believes he has no control over his life but is instead the victim of chance. *All My Sons* (1947) explores the effect of past decisions on the present and future of the individual. *Death of a Salesman* (1949) addresses the loss of identity, as well as a man's inability to accept change within himself and society. *The Crucible* (1953) re-creates the Salem witch trials, focusing on paranoid hysteria as well as the individual's struggle to remain true to ideals and convictions.

A View from the Bridge (1955) details three people and their experiences in crime. *After the Fall* (1964) focuses on betrayal as a trait of humanity. *Incident at Vichy* (1964) confronts a person's struggle with guilt and responsibility. *The Price* (1968) tells the story of an individual confronted with free will and the burden of responsibility.

Fame (1970) tells the story of a famous playwright who is confronted but not recognized. *The American Clock* (1980) focuses on the Depression and its effects on the individual, while *Elegy for a Lady* (1982) addresses death and its effects on relationships. *Some Kind of Love Story* (1982) centers on society and the corruption of justice.

The Ride Down Mountain Morgan (1991) centers around a man who believes he can obtain everything he wants. *The Last Yankee* (1993) explores the changing needs of individuals and the resulting tension that arises within a marriage. *Broken Glass* (1994) tells the story of individuals

using denial as a tool to escape pain. Miller also wrote the screenplay for the movie version of *The Crucible*, which was produced in 1996.

Honors and Awards

Miller has received numerous honors and awards throughout his career. Miller's accolades include the Michigan's Avery Hopwood Award, 1936 and 1937; the Theatre Guild's Bureau of New Plays Award, 1937; the New York Drama Critic's Circle Award, 1947; the Pulitzer Prize, 1949; the New York Drama Critic's Circle Award, 1949; the Antoinette Perry and Donaldson Awards, 1953; and the Gold Medal for Drama by the National Institutes of Arts and Letters, 1959. Miller was also elected president of PEN (Poets, Essayists, and Novelists) in 1965.

CHARACTER ANALYSES

Willy Loman

Death of a Salesman is Willy's play. Everything revolves around his actions during the last 24 hours of his life. All of the characters act in response to Willy, whether in the present or in Willy's recollection of the past. Willy's character, emotions, motivations, and destiny are developed
through his interactions with others. The problem arises, however, because Willy reacts to characters in the present, while simultaneously responding to different characters and different situations in the past. The result is Willy's trademark behavior: contradictory, somewhat angry, and often obsessive.

Willy is an individual who craves attention and is governed by a desire for success. He constantly refers to his older brother Ben, who made a fortune in diamond mining in Africa, because he represents all the things Willy desires for himself and his sons. Willy is forced to work for Howard, the son of his old boss, who fails to appreciate Willy's previous sales experience and expertise. Ben, on the other hand, simply abandoned the city, explored the American and African continents, and went to work for himself. As a result, after four years in the jungle, Ben was a rich man at the age of 21, while Willy must struggle to convince Howard to let him work in New York for a reduced salary after working for the company for 34 years. Willy does not envy Ben, but looks to him as model of success.

The play begins and ends in the present, and the plot occurs during the last two days of Willy's life; however, a large portion of the play consists of Willy's fragmented memories, recollections, and re-creations of the past, which are spliced in between scenes taking place in the present. Willy not only remembers an event but also relives it, engaging himself in the situation as if it is happening for the first time. As the play progresses, Willy becomes more irrational and is not able to transition

between his memory of the past and the reality of the present.
Willy's memories are key to understanding his character. He carefully selects memories or re-creates past events in order to devise situations in which he is successful or to justify his current lack of prosperity. For example, Willy recalls Ben and the job he offered to Willy after being fired by Howard. Willy is unable to cope with the idea that he has failed, so he relives Ben's visit. The memory allows Willy to deny the truth and its consequences—facing Linda and the boys after being fired—and to establish temporary order in his disrupted life. At other times, Willy proudly recalls memories of Biff's last football game because it is more

pleasant to re-create the past in which Biff adored him and wanted to score a touchdown in his name, rather than face the present where he is at odds with his own son.
Willy's constant movement from the present to the past results in his contradictory nature. Although he fondly remembers Biff as a teenager, he is unable to communicate with Biff in the present. As a result, he praises Biff in one breath, while criticizing him in the next. The cause of Willy's inconsistent behavior is his unbidden memories of a long-ago affair, which he forgets or chooses not to remember until the end of Act II. It is difficult enough for Willy to deal with Howard, his buyers (or lack of buyers), and the everyday reminders that he is not a great salesman like Dave Singleman; however, it is even more insufferable for Willy to accept the idea that he is a failure in his son's eyes.
Prior to the Boston trip, Biff, more than anyone, sincerely believes in Willy's success, potential, and inevitable greatness. Willy is able to achieve the success and notoriety he desires only through Biff, but this changes when Biff learns of the affair. After the Boston trip, Willy tries to regain the success he once had by focusing on memories or events prior to the discovery of the affair. It is not surprising that Willy contradicts himself when speaking in the present about Biff or to him, for although Willy chooses to remember Biff as he used to be, he cannot eradicate the words Biff spoke to him in Boston: "You fake! You phony little fake!"
Willy perceives himself as a failure: He is not Dave Singleman. He is just a mediocre salesman who has only made monumental sales in his imagination. Now that he is growing old and less productive, the company he helped to build fires him. He regrets being unfaithful to

his wife, even though he will never admit the affair to her. He is no longer a respectable man in Biff 's eyes. Biff recognizes Willy's tendency to exaggerate or reconstruct reality and is no longer a willing participant in Willy's fantasy. By the end of the play, Willy is overwhelmed; he can no longer deny his failures when they become too many to deal with. Instead, he seeks a solution in suicide. Willy reasons he can finally be a success because his life insurance policy will in some way compensate Linda for his affair. Additionally, Biff will consider him a martyr and respect him after witnessing the large funeral and many mourners Willy is sure will attend.

Biff Loman

Biff is a catalyst. He drives Willy's actions and thoughts, particularly his memories, throughout the play. Whenever Willy is unable to accept the present, he retreats to the past, and Biff is usually there. Prior to his Boston trip, Biff adored Willy. He believed his father's stories and accepted his father's philosophy that a person will be successful, provided that he is "well-liked." Biff never questioned Willy, even when it was obvious that Willy was breaking the rules. As a result, Biff grew up believing that he was not bound by social rules or expectations because Willy did not have to abide by them, nor did Willy expect Biff to. It is not surprising that Biff 's penchant for stealing continued throughout his adult life because Willy encouraged Biff 's "little thefts" while he was growing up. For example, instead of disciplining Biff for stealing the football, Willy praised his initiative.

Biff 's perception of Willy as the ideal father is destroyed after Biff 's trip to Boston. Once he learns that Willy is having an affair, Biff rejects Willy and his philosophy. Biff considers Willy to be a "fake," and he no longer believes in, or goes along with, Willy's grand fantasies of success. Instead, Biff despises his father and everything he represents.

Biff 's problem lies in the fact that, even though he does not want to associate with Willy, he cannot change the fact that he is his son. And as a result, he cannot change the fact that his father has inevitably affected him. It is true that Biff is not a womanizer like his brother Happy, but he has incorporated Willy's tendency to exaggerate and manipulate reality in his favor. For example, Biff truly believes he was a salesman for Oliver, rather than a shipping clerk. It is only when he

confronts Oliver that Biff realizes how wrong he was.
Biff is different from Willy because he does finally accept and embrace the fact that he has been living a lie all of his life. Biff is relieved once he realizes who he is and what he wants, as opposed to who Willy thinks he should be and who Biff needs to pretend to be in order to please him. Once Biff states that "We never told the truth for ten minutes in this house," he severs himself from Willy because he openly refuses to live by Willy's philosophy any longer. Ironically, Biff reconciles with Willy almost immediately following this statement. Since he acknowledges that he, too, is a "fake," Biff can no longer hold a grudge against Willy.

Linda Loman

Linda is a woman in an awkward situation. She knows that Willy is suicidal, irrational, and difficult to deal with; however, she goes along with Willy's fantasies in order to protect him from the criticism of others, as well as his own self-criticism. Linda is Willy's champion. She gently prods him when it comes to paying the bills and communicating with Biff, and she does not lose her temper when he becomes irate. Linda knows that Willy is secretly borrowing money from Charley to pay the life insurance and other bills. She has discovered the rubber hose behind the heater and lives in fear that Willy will try to asphyxiate himself. She is also aware that he has attempted to kill himself several times before. Despite all this, Linda does nothing, afraid to aggravate Willy's fragile mental condition. In fact, she even throws Biff and Happy out when their behavior threatens to upset Willy. In many ways Willy is like a small child, and Linda is like a mother who anxiously protects him from Biff, Happy, and the rest of the world.
Linda is a character driven by desperation and fear. Even though Willy is often rude to her and there is the possibility that Linda suspects Willy may have had an affair, she protects him at all costs. According to Linda, Willy is "only a little boat looking for a harbor." She loves Willy, and more importantly, she accepts all of his shortcomings. She would rather play along with his fantasies of grandeur, or the simple ones like building a garden and growing fresh vegetables, than face the possibility of losing him.

Happy Loman

Happy is a young version of Willy. He incorporates his father's habit of manipulating reality in order to create situations that are more favorable to him. Happy grew up listening to Willy embellish the truth, so it is not surprising that Happy exaggerates his position in order to create the illusion of success. Instead of admitting he is an assistant to the assistant,
Happy lies and tells everyone he is the assistant buyer. This is Willy's philosophy all over again.
Happy also relishes the fact that "respectable" women cannot resist him. He has seduced the fiancées of three executives just to gain a perception of pleasure and power. He thrives on sexual gratification, but even more than that, Happy savors the knowledge that he has "ruined" women engaged to men he works for and also despises. He states, "I hate myself for it. Because I don't want the girl, and, still, I take it and—I love it!" Happy is similar to Willy in two ways. Both deny their positions and exaggerate details in order to aggrandize themselves,
and sexual interludes are the defining moments of both of their lives. Willy's life revolves around his attempt to forget his affair with the Woman, while Happy's life revolves around an active pursuit of affairs with many women.

Miller's Manipulation of Time and Space

Miller often experiments with narrative style and technique. For example, Miller includes lengthy exposition pieces that read as stage directions within *The Crucible*. At first glance, it seems that an audience must either read the information in the program or listen to a longwinded narrator. Upon further inspection however, it becomes apparent that Miller's inclusion of background material allows actors and directors to study character motivation and internalize the information, thereby portraying it in the performance.

Miller provides audiences with a unique experience when it comes to *Death of a Salesman*. In many ways, the play appears traditional. In other words, there are actors who interact with one another, there is a basic plot line, and the play contains standard dramatic elements such as exposition, rising action, conflict, climax, and so forth. However, Miller's manipulation of time and space creates a very non-traditional atmosphere that is unsettling but effective because it mirrors Willy's mental state, thereby allowing the audience to witness his mental instability and take part in it.

Stage directions call for a complete house for the Lomans. An audience will not simply watch the action take place in the kitchen but can observe several rooms within the home. This sounds as if it would be distracting since an audience can view several things at once. After all, what should the audience look at? If more than one character is on stage, whom should the audience pay attention to? Miller solves this problem through lighting. Only characters that are talking or involved in direct action are lit on stage, all other rooms, characters, and props remain in shadow. The result is a vast number of rooms and props that can be utilized immediately. The audience does not have to wait while a new set is erected or an old one torn down, but instead moves directly and instantaneously into the next scene. Such movement without the benefit of time delays or dialogue transitions produces a disjointed and fragmented sequence of events, much like a dream. In fact, the stage directions in Act I describe the house as follows: "An air of the dream clings to the place, a dream arising out of reality."

Miller does not stop there. Even though the action of the play can

shift from one part of the house to another without delay, the action is still limited to the present. Willy's dreams, memories, or recollections of past events must be revealed in a manner that is distinct from actions taking place in the present. This is important for two reasons: First, the audience must be able to differentiate between the present and the past in order to follow the action of the play; second, Willy's increased agitation must be apparent to the audience, and there is no better way to reveal it than to have the audience observe his inability to separate the past from the reality of the present.

Miller achieves this effect by manipulating the space and boundaries of the rooms. When action takes place in the present, characters observe wall boundaries and enter and exit through the doors. During Willy's recollections of the past, characters do not observe wall boundaries, and the action generally takes place in the area at the front of the stage, rather than inside the house. As a result, the audience can distinguish present events from Willy's memories. For example, in Act I, Scene 3, Willy pours a glass of milk in the kitchen, sits down, and begins to mumble to himself. He is in the present. He then remembers a past conversation with the teenage Biff and resumes the conversation. Since this is a past event, Willy directs his speech through the wall to a point offstage. This cues the audience that Willy is digressing in the past.

Sound is also used to create a dreamlike state for both Willy and the audience. A flute melody is associated with Willy, Ben has his own music, laughter cues the Woman, and so forth. Once the sound is introduced with the appropriate character, the audience automatically associates the sound with that same character. As a result, Miller is able to prompt reactions and expectations from the audience, whether they are aware or not. For example, in Act II, Scene 14, it appears that things have finally been settled between Willy and Biff. Even though Biff is leaving in the morning, he and Willy have reconciled. This puts the audience at ease, but once Ben's music is heard, it is evident that the play has not reached its final conclusion. In fact, Ben's appearance may create anxiety for the audience because it suggests an alternate, more disturbing, end to the play.

As the play progresses, the action shifts to the front of the stage. In other words, the audience becomes increasingly aware that the majority of the action is taking place inside Willy's head. It is difficult enough to watch an individual lose his or her identity. It is extremely unsettling and

disturbing to be forced to experience the individual's memories, illusions, or perhaps delusions resulting in mental instability. Miller takes that into consideration and then pushes his audiences to the extreme. As Willy's mental state declines, the audience is forced to watch and to react. As a result, the play may be called *Death of a Salesman*, but it is a death observed and experienced by every member of the audience.

Major Themes within *Death of a Salesman*

Death of a Salesman addresses loss of identity and a man's inability to accept change within himself and society. The play is a montage of memories, dreams, confrontations, and arguments, all of which make up the last 24 hours of Willy Loman's life. The three major themes within the play are denial, contradiction, and order versus disorder. Each member of the Loman family is living in denial or perpetuating a cycle of denial for others. Willy Loman is incapable of accepting the fact that he is a mediocre salesman. Instead Willy strives for his version of the American dream—success and notoriety—even if he is forced to deny reality in order to achieve it. Instead of acknowledging that he is not a well-known success, Willy retreats into the past and chooses to relive past memories and events in which he is perceived as successful. For example, Willy's favorite memory is of Biff's last football game because Biff vows to make a touchdown just for him. In this scene in the past, Willy can hardly wait to tell the story to his buyers. He considers himself famous as a result of his son's pride in him. Willy's sons, Biff and Happy, adopt Willy's habit of denying or manipulating reality and practice it all of their lives, much to their detriment. It is only at the end of the play that Biff admits he has been a "phony" too, just like Willy. Linda is the only character that recognizes the Loman family lives in denial; however, she goes along with Willy's fantasies in order to preserve his fragile mental state.

The second major theme of the play is contradiction. Throughout the play, Willy's behavior is riddled with inconsistencies. In fact, the only thing consistent about Willy is his inconsistency. From the very beginning of Act I, Scene 1, Willy reveals this tendency. He labels Biff a "lazy bum" but then contradicts himself two lines later when he states, "And such a hard worker. There's one thing about Biff—he's not lazy."

Willy's contradictions often confuse audiences at the beginning of the play; however, they soon become a trademark of his character. Willy's inconsistent behavior is the result of his inability to accept reality and his tendency to manipulate or re-create the past in an attempt to escape the present. For example, Willy cannot resign himself to the fact that Biff no longer respects him because of Willy's affair. Rather than admit that their relationship is irreconcilable, Willy retreats to a previous time when Biff admired and respected him. As the play continues, Willy disassociates himself more and more from the present as his problems become too numerous to deal with.

The third major theme of the play, which is order versus disorder, results from Willy's retreats into the past. Each time Willy loses himself in the past, he does so in order to deny the present, especially if the present is too difficult to accept. As the play progresses, Willy spends more and more time in the past as a means of reestablishing order in his life. The more fragmented and disastrous reality becomes, the more necessary it is for Willy to create an alternative reality, even if it requires him to live solely in the past. This is demonstrated immediately after Willy is fired. Ben appears, and Willy confides "nothing's working out. I don't know what to do." Ben quickly shifts the conversation to Alaska and offers Willy a job. Linda appears and convinces Willy that he should stay in sales, just like Dave Singleman. Willy's confidence quickly resurfaces,
and he is confident that he has made the right decision by turning down Ben's offer; he is certain he will be a success like Singleman. Thus, Willy's memory has distracted him from the reality of losing his job. Denial, contradiction, and the quest for order versus disorder comprise the three major themes of *Death of a Salesman*. All three themes work together to create a dreamlike atmosphere in which the audience watches a man's identity and mental stability slip away. The play continues to affect audiences because it allows them to hold a mirror up to themselves. Willy's self-deprecation, sense of failure, and overwhelming regret are emotions that an audience can relate to because everyone has experienced them at one time or another. Individuals continue to react to *Death of a Salesman* because Willy's situation is not unique: He made a mistake—a mistake that irrevocably changed his relationship with the people he loves most—and when all of his

attempts to eradicate his mistake fail, he makes one grand attempt to correct the mistake. Willy vehemently denies Biff 's claim that they are both common, ordinary people, but ironically, it is the universality of the play which makes it so enduring. Biff 's statement, "I'm a dime a dozen, and so are you" is true after all.