Though the town is initially supportive of Ill, immediately in this scene (which takes place only the day after Claire’s pronouncement) the audience can see that they are already starting to doubt their rejection of Claire’s offer. For one, everyone has begun to borrow money to buy various luxuries: nicer clothes, finer liquor, better food, and so on. They would not do so, and perhaps their creditors would not allow them to do so, unless they expected to come into possession of money in the near future; and with Guellen's otherwise slim prospects, it is obvious they must be counting on Claire’s money. Ill starts to realize this for himself, and this scene marks the beginning of his anxiety.

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**Knowledge Check**

*How well do you know this scene?*

1. **What is Ill's son's name?**
   (a) Jacob.
   (b) Eryk.
   (c) Hans.
   (d) Karl.

2. **Where was Claire's first husband from?**
   (a) Australia.
   (b) Armenia.
   (c) Argentina.
   (d) America.

3. **What season is it?**
   (a) Spring.
   (b) Summer.
   (c) Winter.
   (d) Autumn.

4. **Who was Claire's third husband?**
   (a) King Ferdinand.
   (b) Duke of Winchester.
   (c) Count Holk.
   (d) Count Zachman.

5. **What does Claire smoke?**
   (a) Pipes.
   (b) Cigarettes.
   (c) Cigarellos.
   (d) Cigars.

6. **How does Claire drink her whiskey?**
   (a) As a Manhattan.
   (b) Shaken.
   (c) Neat.
   (d) On ice.

7. **Who is the woman who runs half naked across the stage in Act 1, Scene 1?**
   (a) Louisa.
   (b) Claire.
   (c) Wilma.
   (d) Sarah.

8. **What is Claire's 8th husband's occupation?**
   (a) Film star.
   (b) Oil refiner.
   (c) Nobel Prize winner.
   (d) Stockbroker.

9. **What nationality is Claire's 8th husband?**
   (a) American.
   (b) French.
   (c) German.
   (d) Italian.

10. **How do the townspeople begin buying things in Act 2?**
    (a) On credit.
    (b) With silver.
    (c) With cash.
    (d) With gold.
Understanding and Interpretation

1. Which members of Ill's family do we meet at the start of Act 2? What do they do? How do they treat Ill?

2. What is different about Ill's customers' purchases this morning? Provide three examples:

3. While the townspeople express their support for Ill, does anything they say sound a little strange or ominous? Find two or three examples:

4. What is Claire doing throughout this scene? How are her actions presented? How does she relate to the rest of the scene?

5. Summarise Ill's visit to the Policeman:
Dramatic Study: Symbolism

"You’re wearing new shoes. New yellow shoes."

In the days following her dramatic announcement, Ill sees Claire’s henchmen regularly changing the wreaths on the empty coffin Claire brought with her to Guellen. He also sees an increase in business at the general store he manages; his customers have started buying previously unattainable luxury items on credit. When Ill notices his customers all wearing the same new and expensive yellow shoes, he begins to feel anxious. Meanwhile, Claire observes the town from her balcony at the Golden Apostle as a mob of Guelleners hunt down her escaped black panther.

The coffin, yellow shoes and black panther are all examples of symbolism. Symbols are objects, people, places, sounds, or even actions that are substituted for ideas, abstract concepts or situations. Symbols are always concrete referents; they can be seen, heard, touched or otherwise perceived by way of a person’s senses. This is true for coffins, shoes and panthers. The concepts they symbolise are unstated, or abstract; in this way, a symbol “may be regarded as a metaphor from which the first term has been omitted.” (Brooks and Warren, Understanding Poetry) Because of this, symbols can often seem mysterious, need inferring, and are open to interpretation.

A symbol that recurs in a text becomes a motif. Be careful to watch what happens to each symbol in this case. Does it change, grow, disappear, get used in some way? These developments can be an important part of coming to a full understanding of a writer’s use of symbolism in a particular text.

Activity

What do you understand the symbolism of the objects in this scene to be? Write your ideas as fully as you can in the table below using your own words, then share them with a classmate:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coffin</th>
<th>![Coffin Image]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yellow shoes</td>
<td>![Yellow Shoes Image]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Panther</td>
<td>![Black Panther Image]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- What other items in the play do you think are symbolic?
Important Theme: Humanism and Morality

“You can get anything you want with money.”

Guellen sees itself as a humanist town, a place with a value system that rejects selfishness and emphasizes the human capacity for compassion and respect. Claire’s attempt to bribe the town into killing its most popular citizen for revenge is anti-humanist and disregards the moral and legal imperatives that the town claims to value. However, the townspeople soon begin to struggle to hold onto their idealistic values when greed begins to set in. Will they set their compassion aside in favour of money and selfishness and murder one of their own? When Claire laid out the terms of her donation to the town, the Mayor reacted with outrage. Citig humanist values, on page 39 he said: “You forget, we are not savages. In the name of all citizens of Guellen, I reject your offer; and I reject it in the name of humanity. We would rather have poverty than blood on our hands.” The Mayor’s strident tone when delivering these lines suggested he was offended by Claire’s offer and strongly sates that his people will never place money above their morality.

Not long after Act 2 Scene 1 begins, this quote starts to sound cynical! Dürrenmatt suggests that even cherished principles, such as the sanctity of human life, are up for negotiation – particularly when money is up for grabs. In light of the historical context of the play, this idea becomes even more significant. First staged in 1956, The Visit played a decade after the Second World War, in which much of Europe indeed acted like ‘savages’. In particular, Dürrenmatt was angered by the Swiss refusal to aid the Jews and the nation’s acceptance of looted Nazi gold; and he undoubtedly meant the line about not wanting ‘blood on our hands’ ironically. Supposed European morality had certainly not stopped people in several nations, including Switzerland, from killing their own people for personal gain.

Activity

Dürrenmatt is careful to include a cross-section of society in his representation of the town. People from all walks of life are represented: policemen, teachers, journalists, politicians and more. Can you find lines that indicate all people, no matter their walk of life or position in the town, seem willing to negotiate their principles in return for personal – or financial – gain:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policeman</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politician</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>