The Visit: Act 2 Scene 2 (To: “I am lost!”)

“No one wants to kill you.”

Ill goes to the Mayor, who already has spoken for the town in rejecting Claire's offer. Like everyone else, though, the mayor has upgraded his standard of living and – also like everyone else – he dismisses Ill’s concerns. He becomes outraged (or feigns outrage) that Ill would suggest his own hometown could conspire against him. Moreover, the Mayor starts to see that Claire has a point about Ill’s treatment of her. He does not yet assert that Ill is deserving of death on that account, but his thoughts are beginning to tend in that direction. Even the priest, who represents European religion, succumbs to this ambivalence, and carries with him a rifle. Hearing everybody assert their support, but seeing them act in contrary ways, Ill decides the best thing to do might be to get on the next train out of town; so he makes his way to the station, where a crowd has gathered to see him off…

Knowledge Check
How well do you know this scene?

1. What kind of tie is the mayor wearing?
   (a) Cotton.
   (b) Silk.
   (c) Bowtie.
   (d) Mink.

2. What does the mayor have sitting on his desk?
   (a) A revolver.
   (b) A shotgun.
   (c) A dagger.
   (d) A sword.

3. Of whom does Claire say "They need me, and I need them"?
   (a) The children.
   (b) The reporters.
   (c) The husbands.
   (d) The Town Hall.

4. What does the priest have which startles Ill?
   (a) A revolver.
   (b) A dagger.
   (c) A rifle.
   (d) A bayonet.

5. What does the priest tell Ill is rising?
   (a) The spectre of his guilt.
   (b) The realization of his crimes.
   (c) The spectre of his soul.
   (d) The suffering of mankind.

6. The Priest tells Ill, "You are your own ___
   (a) Conscience.
   (b) Justice.
   (c) Truth.
   (d) Hell.

7. Who has acquired a washing machine?
   (a) The Heimbergers.
   (b) The Police Headquarters.
   (c) The Siemethofers.
   (d) Ill's family.

8. What does the Priest tell Ill to do when he flings himself on him?
   (a) Repent.
   (b) Kill himself.
   (c) Flee.
   (d) Die.

9. What does the Priest say he is about to perform in Act 2, Scene 2?
   (a) A baptism.
   (b) A mass.
   (c) A marriage.
   (d) A funeral.

10. What does Ill say the people are hunting him like?
    (a) A wild animal.
    (b) A panther.
    (c) A rabid dog.
    (d) A criminal.
1. When Ill goes to visit the policeman, what does he ask? What is the policeman’s response?

2. How does the Mayor speak to Ill? How has his tone changed since his proclamation of support in Act 1?

3. What is the Priest’s opinion of Ill’s problems when he goes to see him? How is the priest’s response similar or different to the other people of the town?

4. How does Act 2 illustrate the theme of ‘denial’ in an effective way?

5. Throughout this scene, Claire speaks about her previous husbands. What do you find out about them? Is there a recurring theme in the way she talks about her past marriages?
Dramatic Study: Irony

“You’re forgetting you’re in Guellen. A city of Humanist traditions.”

Throughout the play, the characters often say the opposite of what they mean; in other words, they speak **ironically**. This incongruity quickly becomes obvious to the audience, and often compels readers and viewers to respond with laughter. For example, Ill tells Claire that she looks the same as she did when they were young, but in fact, many of her limbs have been replaced with prostheses. Actually, Claire’s artificial body is an example of **visual irony**. Superficially, it is all artifice: her body is an assemblage of prosthetic limbs apparently held together by a vengeful fury. Her leg is made of wood; her hand is made of ivory; her white wedding dress is worn by a former prostitute. Despite this, Claire is the only character who never deceives anyone. She is honest about her appearance and about her desire to see Ill killed. Claire embodies the disconnect between appearance and reality that is demonstrated by other characters, except her disconnect is in reverse: she looks artificial but always speaks the truth.

In Act 2, Dürenmatt’s use of **verbal and visual irony** comes into its own as Ill notices the behaviour of the townspeople changing around him. Throughout this scene, Ill slowly realizes that the Guelleners are living above their means, which is visually apparent in the expensive yellow shoes they are suddenly wearing. At the beginning of the play, the townspeople wore drab clothes and insisted that they would never kill Ill for money; but as more and more people put on yellow shoes (and buy themselves more into Claire’s debt), it becomes clear that the town’s good intentions have changed.

**Activity**

Can you distinguish between and explain examples of **verbal and visual irony** in Act 2? Complete the following table with a new comment and example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Remington Typewriter</td>
<td>An example of <strong>visual irony</strong>. Even as the Mayor says to Ill, “You’re forgetting you’re in Guellen. A city of Humanist traditions. Goethe spent a night here. Brahms composed a quartet here. We owe allegiance to our lofty heritage.” a man comes in to deliver his new – and expensive – purchase. Dürenmatt uses verbal and visual irony that even those who are supposed to uphold Humanist principles cannot resist the temptation of greed and selfishness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow shoes</td>
<td>An example of <strong>visual irony</strong>. Even as a customer says to Ill…</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dramatic Study: *Rising Tension*

‘*Why have you all come so close to me?’*

Act 2 closes on a chilling scene at the train station which could almost be from a horror film, where the hero realises he is in mortal danger but is unable to escape. In terms of the play so far, this moment is certainly the dramatic high point – the point at which the tension onstage is at its highest.

**Activity**

Using the end of Act 2 as the final point, create a tension graph of the play so far. Include exposition and the inciting incident from Act 1 and details from Act 2 to demonstrate how Durrenmatt manages the tension onstage:
In Act 2 Scene 2, we see the Priest of Guellen as III turns to him for help. As a symbolic figure, it is hard to deny Dürenmatt’s criticism of the church in this scene, through the Priest's behaviour and choices. The character of the priest is one of the weakest, choosing to hide behind ceremony and rhetoric, rather than actually trying to help III or guide the townspeople.

Throughout the play, Dürenmatt turns his critical eye on other social institutions as well. It’s no accident that there is one town priest, one town policeman, one butcher, one store owner, and so on. As the town of Guellen is fictional, we can assume that the people of the play are representative of Europeans as a whole. In such circumstances, the Priest would be seen as a representative of all priests, the Mayor of all politicians, and so on. All of Dürenmatt’s writing deals, in one way or another, with the twin institutions of Church and State and the theme of justice: he came to believe that in the world there is no freedom with justice and no justice with freedom. After World War Two, he saw the emergence of Marxism (Communism), which gave its citizens justice, but no freedom; and Western Capitalism, which gave freedom, but no justice.

For example, an important aspect of the behaviour of all the town’s significant figures is denial. The policeman, priest and the Mayor deny adamantly that they would stoop below Western ideals to commit murder, yet throughout the play they inch ever closer to committing just this act. Given the influences of time and place on Dürenmatt, this play suggests parallels with the Holocaust; the eradication of the Jews while people ‘looked the other way’ or lived in denial about what was going on in their own towns and cities.

**Activity**

Discuss the actions and dialogue different members of the town community. Complete the chart below, indicating which institutions are the targets of Durrenmatt’s various criticisms. What can you conclude from this activity?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denial</th>
<th>Evasion of Responsibility</th>
<th>Greed</th>
<th>Complicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Priest</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policeman</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Storekeeper</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mayor</td>
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</table>