The Visit: Act 3 Scene 1 (To: “…into Konrad’s Wood.”)

“Humanitarianism has to sit down.”

The dark side of Claire's absurd character is developed in greater detail in this scene. That Claire is motivated by revenge is obvious already; hardly anything else could motivate her desire to see Ill dead. The desperation of her revenge, however, is displayed by the fact that she bought up all of the businesses in Guellen for the express purpose of destroying the town’s economy. She wanted to make the people desperate so they would do what she wanted when she returned with her offer.

Meanwhile, the Schoolmaster gathers up courage and decides he is going to tell the press about Claire's offer. Unexpectedly, Ill explains that he has thought about what he did to Claire and realized that he brought this situation on himself. The Schoolmaster takes him aside and predicts the people will eventually be too tempted by Claire's offer and will kill him. He even includes himself: though he speaks rationally now, eventually, he too will be swayed.

Knowledge Check
How well do you know this scene?

1. Where does Act 3, Scene 1 open?
   (a) Petersen's Barn.
   (b) The Church.
   (c) Konrad's Village Wood.
   (d) The Hospital.

2. What does Claire use to examine her guests in Act 3, Scene 1?
   (a) A lorgnette.
   (b) Sunglasses.
   (c) A magnifying glass.
   (d) Eyeglasses.

3. From what passage of the bible did the Priest make a sermon in Act 3, Scene 1?
   (a) Revelations, nine.
   (b) Luther, thirteen.
   (c) First Corinthians, thirteen.
   (d) Matthew, thirteen.

4. Where has Claire sent Hoby in Act 3, Scene 1?
   (a) Hong Kong.
   (b) China.
   (c) Italy.
   (d) Geiselgasteig.

5. Where was the Schoolmaster offered a job in Act 3, Scene 1?
   (a) Kalberstadt College.
   (b) Kaffigen College.
   (c) Stockholm College.
   (d) Humboldt University.

6. What kind of cigarettes does the butcher buy in Act 3, Scene 2?
   (a) Romeo and Juliets.
   (b) Camels.
   (c) Marlboros.
   (d) Dunhills.

7. What is the name of Ill's daughter in the play?
   (a) Hilda.
   (b) Grusha.
   (c) Ottilie.
   (d) Natalie.

8. Who does the Schoolmaster say he is an admirer of in Act 3, Scene 2?
   (a) Bach.
   (b) Cato.
   (c) Plato.
   (d) Socrates.

9. Who does the Schoolmaster compare Claire to in Act 3?
   (a) Juliet.
   (b) Medea.
   (c) Ophelia.
   (d) Hamlet.

10. What do the reporters want a photograph of Ill selling?
    (a) An axe.
    (b) A dagger.
    (c) A fur.
    (d) A rifle.
Understanding and Interpretation

1. What does Claire admit to (about Guellen’s dire situation) at the start of Act 3 Scene 1?

2. Describe Mrs Ill’s behaviour and attitude towards her husband:

3. How has Ill’s attitude changed since we saw him last?

4. What suggestion does the Mayor make, and how does Ill react? Can you explain his reaction?

5. How does this scene develop the theme of appearance and reality?
Dramatic Study: Language and Style

“I know that one day an old lady will come for us too, and then what happened to you will also happen to us, but soon... I will have lost that knowledge.”

The people of Guellen all seem to speak at a level more sophisticated than one would imagine the citizens of a poor city would be capable of. For example, the townspeople frequently use obscure words like "demoniac" and seem to be casually familiar with Greek mythology, like when they compare Claire's demeanor to Clotho, one of the Three Fates, or Medea. They are also very proud of their "Western principles"; they sound more like philosophers than common townsfolk.

The speech of most of the characters is similar in Acts 1 and 2; characters speak in short lines that have a lyrical quality. Repetition, mellifluousness and even occasional bouts of song or poetry are all features of the language. In Act 2, where Claire is heard from her balcony while Ill is in his shop, she seems at times to almost be in song, fitting her characterisation as Fate, as if she has stepped straight from the pages of a Greek Tragedy. At the beginning of the play, and at certain points throughout as well, the townspeople speak in a metered, rhyming chorus. This also fits the style of a Greek Tragedy, and the stage directions in Act 3 even direct that the townspeople are broken into "two choruses, resembling those of Greek tragedy."

In Act 3, there is a definite development of the style of language used by the townspeople. Where previously lines had been short and sharp, in Act 3 there are several long speeches. Firstly, Claire reveals the truth about Guellen’s economic misfortune and her plan for revenge against the town and Ill. Then, various secondary characters like the reporters and the Schoolmaster are given several long speeches – almost monologues – in which they wrestle with the town’s moral conundrum.

In fact, the Schoolmaster is one of the play’s most important secondary characters. He has been Ill’s staunchest defender – and therefore a defender of Humanist values. However, he is not immune to the terrible temptation of greed and money, and recognises that he and the town will eventually be unable to resist Claire’s offer. After wrestling with his conscience, he announces that he wants to “make a speech” and that he “must unleash the voice of thunder.” His extended speeches admitting that the town are more selfish and greedier than he imagined are some of the darkest moments of the play.

Activity

Focus on the extended speeches (monologues) delivered by the schoolmaster. Here are some of his most noteworthy lines. What do these lines have to say about morality in the town, or in the wider world? Complete this chart with your thoughts:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schoolmaster’s lines</th>
<th>Comment on morality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guelleners! I want to reveal the truth, even if our poverty endures forever!</td>
<td>The Schoolteacher represents the most Humanist of all the people in the town. It is he who holds onto his morality for longest. However – even he eventually turns on Ill. This suggests that the power of money is so great that no-one is safe from temptation, despite what he says here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You’re the one to be ashamed, woman. You’re paving your way to betray your own husband.</td>
<td>Ill’s wife represents love and fidelity. People marry ‘for better or worse, for richer or poorer.’ These promises cannot last in the face of greed and the desire for personal gain. Even his own family will betray him. Also points to the hypocrisy of the schoolteacher. He repeats ‘you’re’, shifting the responsibility on to her – but he admits later that everybody, including himself, is complicit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I’m telling the gentlemen of the Press the truth... Because I’m a humanist, a lover of the ancient Greeks, an admirer of Plato.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I wanted to help you. But they shouted me down.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>No right compared to that damned old woman... making a collection of our souls?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>They will kill you. I’ve known it from the beginning, and you’ve known it for a long time too, even if no one else in Guellen wants to admit it.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Literary Context: Anti-Humanism**

‘Feeling for others, gentleman, is cut for the purse of an ordinary millionaire.’

Claire is the personification of anti-humanism, since she disregards the individuality of others and believes that money is the ultimate power in the world. This is clear in the price she puts on Ill’s head, and in the way that she treats her husbands and associates. Claire’s source of power is financial; she buys her butlers out of legal trouble and respectable careers and pays her servants handsomely. In return they allow her to treat them contemptibly by, for example, changing their names to ridiculous rhymes. In essence she turns people into commodities that can be bought or sold. The most disturbing thing about The Visit is how willingly others are to allow her to do this, which is a direct subversion of humanist ideals. Claire openly boasts that she is able to purchase and own others’ lofty ideals.

The ease with which the Guelleners fall under Claire’s spell is a direct comment on the Second World War, during which Dürrenmatt saw the collapse of humanism in Europe: stable democracies fell to fascism and ideals of tolerance and justice failed to stop millions of disabled, homosexual, ethnic minority, and Jewish citizens from being incarcerated in concentration camps, tortured and murdered. Moreover, Dürrenmatt was enraged by Swiss cowardice and hypocrisy, which they tried to disguise as ‘humanist.’ Switzerland remained neutral throughout the conflict, but Dürrenmatt saw the ways his government subtly collaborated with the Nazis (by selling weapons to Germany, refusing Jewish refugees, and storing stolen wealth in Swiss banks). In this context, the Mayor’s statement that Guellen would refuse Claire’s offer because “We are still in Europe. We’re not savages yet” is clearly ironic; for Dürrenmatt, European values were merely a veil for a refusal to stand strong in the face of evil.

**Activity**

Create a mind-map for the themes of humanism and anti-humanism. Add lines of dialogue spoken by Claire (and other characters) as well as the information you’ve learned about Durrenmatt’s thoughts and feelings on this topic.

**Discussion Point: Claire’s Plan**

‘I can’t buy Sunshine Square because I own it already.’

It is revealed in this scene that the economic situation of the town is down to Claire. She bought up all the town’s institutions and intentionally ran them into the ground for the sole purpose of enacting revenge on Ill. Given her enormous wealth and power, there would have been much easier ways to kill Ill; for example, she could just hire assassins to do the job.

So why do you think Claire chose this plan of action? How does this plan reflect aspects of her character you have noticed elsewhere? To what extent is Claire’s love for Ill and her desire for revenge an important motivator? Discuss your thoughts and ideas in pairs, then share your conclusions with the class and listen to what others think as well.