

*By now you might have been in to see our production. I hope you can therefore understand that to have released this 2nd instalment of the educational material beforehand would have, as they say, given the game away, let the cat out of the bag and destroyed any attempt on our behalf at pulling the preverbal wool over your eyes.*

*I hope that you enjoyed the play and that this will be of use to you.*

*All best wishes,*

*Ian Burns*

## **That-Theatre's version of Sleuth/Acting-out in Class**

Task: Practice acting out the essential monologue by Milo at the end of the play about Andrews' life: "No. Most people want someone to live with. But you have no life to give to anyone ...."

### **The Play – Reading**

#### **Description/Plot**

Task: Give a brief outline of Act 2. Divide the act into sections and given each section a headline. Account for your choice.

Task: Some critics tend to believe that;  
"Sleuth is a dramatization within a drama ... The only real moment in the play occurs in the very last seconds, as Andrew shoots Milo and sees the flashing lights of the police car".

Comment on this quote and try to explain why this may be the reason.

#### **Characters in the play**

Task: Milo Tindle takes on the role of Inspector Doppler, who comes to question Andrew about Milo's murder in Act 2. Describe this incident and comment on Doppler's method(s) when questioning Andrew. Next, how does Andrew react when Inspector Doppler reveals his true identity (that he is Milo)?

Task: Milo further takes on the roles of Detective Sergeant Tarrant and Police Constable Higgs. Give a characterization of these two guys.

Task: Does Milo and/or Andrew change as people during the play. Trace and account for the development/progression of the two characters.

Task: How would you characterize Andrew and Milo's relationship? Some critics tend to believe that they are engaged in a homosexual relationship with extreme hatred and profound affection. What is your personal opinion?

## **Female Characters not introduced but mentioned in the play**

Task: Why does Andrew's girlfriend co-operate with Milo in the second deception in Act II?

## **The Idea of Game-playing/Power-relationships in Sleuth**

Task: “I wanted to get to know you – to see if you were, as I suspected, my sort of person”. What does Andrew mean?

Task: At a certain point Andrew becomes a little worried about Milo’s capacity for game-playing, and says to him “My, dear boy, I quite appreciate you have been captivated by the spirit of games-playing and the need as you see it, to get even, but frankly you are trying too hard to be a big boy, too soon”. What does he mean when he says that Milo is trying too hard? Is it not what he wanted him to do?

Task: Later, Andrew pleads with Milo to stay with him, telling him “You and I are evenly matched. We know what it is to play a game and that is so rare”. Why does Andrew need Milo to stay with him?

Task: When talking about game-playing in Sleuth we may talk about a victim and a victimizer. However, there is a moment in the play where the victim and victimizer become identical and they exchange roles. Discuss when this turning point seems to take place?

Task: How does the game-playing end. Who has won in the end and who has been destroyed? Why do you think Andrew uses real bullets at the end of the play? Why does he shoot him?

Task: How would you describe the game-playing in Sleuth – is it a psychological power-game-playing or maybe more a sado-masochistic power-game playing? Discuss in class and state your point of view by giving textual references.

## **Minor and Major Themes in Sleuth**

Task: Comment on the theme(s) of the play. How do the following themes in the below-mentioned box apply to the play?

Divide (if possible) the themes into minor and major themes, and try to explain your ranging. Feel free to add more themes of your own.

Box with possible themes: *Deception – Revenge – Theft – Class and Race Language as an instrument of Power – The Line between Illusion/fiction and Reality/fact – Fascination with the Idea of Death as Release from Human Restraint – Game-Playing as substitute for genuine feeling – The Theme of Twinning/Doubling and Halving – Dominance and Submission- Betrayal – Alienation from Society etc.*

Task: Throughout the play you will find many textual references to the theme/idea of twinning, doubling or halving. Find some of them. Comment on them.

## **A Question of Genre and Suspense?**

Task: In an interview with Mel Gussow, 1970, Shaffer declares “that his purpose in *Sleuth* was to spoof Agatha Christie and the cosy crime genre – and at the same time to use it – to have my cake and eat it too”. Comment on this quotation.

Task: What are the elements of the traditional detective genre that Shaffer employs? What then are the non-traditional (more modern) devices/elements that Shaffer employs? Explain how Shaffer both parodies and employs traditional mystery/crime devices in *Sleuth*?

Task: Traditionally, detective stories present characters that can be judged by the end of the story as clearly good or evil. The good ones discover the true nature of the evil characters and bring them to justice. Why is this not the case in *Sleuth*?

Task: Some critics tend to agree that “*Sleuth* is not a whodunit but more a whodunwhat, where not only the identity of the criminal but the nature of the

crime, indeed, the reality and reliability of everything we've seen with our eyes is part of the mystery". First, define "a whodunit" and "a whodunwhat". Next, comment on the quote. Do you agree/disagree. Why?/ Why not?

Task: Is Milo really dead at the end of the play. Why is the reader still a little puzzled? Why does the end become ambiguous to the reader/the audience?

Task: In traditional detective stories, as for instance those written by Agatha Christie, there is often the certainty that the murder will occur just before the end of the first act, with the second act then devoted to the solving of the whodunit. Trace how this traditional detective crime story- pattern differs from Sleuth?

Task: To which genre category does Sleuth belong. Fiction or non-fiction? Next, discuss. Can Sleuth be titled a crime story, a suspense story, a thriller, a mystery story ... Or is it just a (short) story with a crime in it? Try to reach a definition of genres.

Task: How is suspense created in Sleuth? Is there a climax, an anti-climax?

Task: Consider the plausibility of Sleuth – How close to real life does the story seem to be? Can the reader believe in what is being told? Is the plot logical and plausible and the psychology convincing?

## **Post-reading**

### **Pro and against Sleuth – an overall discussion**

Task: Discuss. Does Sleuth live up to Van Dine's "Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories"? (see reading list/Whodunnit). Try and argue for or against.

Task: Discuss objections for and against Sleuth in general. Discuss, and if possible reach agreement.

Task: Shaffer plays hide and seek with his readers. How does he manage to do that? When does it become clear to the readers that what is occurring is illusion? Why does the whodunit seem to become the least important aspect of the play?

Task: Discuss. How were you left feeling at the end of the play. Write down five adjectives which best describe your mood.

Task: Discuss the main functions of the play. To entertain? To give insight? To indoctrinate? Or to...?

### **Creative Writing:**

Task: Write a summary of the play. Use as many words as possible from the list below. Present your summary in class.

*: two men – game-playing - country-house- crime/mystery writer – mistress- lure of money- dresses up as a clown- trapped- Doppler – Tea- fatal murder- to get even with- false identity.*

Task: Comment on the message of the play. If any? (2 min creative writing)

Task: Transform the story into a journalistic account (into non-fiction). I.e; rewrite the story of Sleuth as a newspaper article to be printed in the local newspaper .

Task: Write-on. If we assume that Milo is dead at the end of the play, how do you think Andrews' life will be in the future? Will he miss Milo as a game-playing mate? What do you think?

Task: Discuss. How does Shaffer play hide and seek with both the characters in the play and the readers? How does Shaffer in *Sleuth* turn the role of the reader and writer upside down?

Task: You are a literary journalist. Write an article telling your readers why they should/should not read the play you have just read. *Useful linkers: to being with – secondly – another reason is – the main thing is – the most important aspect – oddly/surprisingly/strangely enough – as a rule – on the whole – the point is in my opinion – as I see it – from my point of view – well, personally – what I am more concerned with – what I find particularly interesting is - the play conveys – in the opening scenes – what fascinates me- I will(will not recommend this play to ...*

Task: Comment on the quote said by Shaffer: “... *Sleuth* is not just a thriller. The subtext is nightmarish. The whole idea of people committed to a games situation. In this case fairly sinister people. If there is a focal point, it’s that if people take fantasy for reality, and act upon it, it must end in disaster”.

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*Dear Reader,*

*Our next production is about Casanova’s last day on the planet.  
It’s called CASANOVA UNDONE and will play in Krudttønden from  
February the 25<sup>th</sup> till March 25<sup>th</sup> 2009*

*If you have any comments please send them to [pr@that-theatre.com](mailto:pr@that-theatre.com) or visit  
our blog: <http://thattheatre.wordpress.com>*

*Ian Burns*

*[www.that-theatre.com](http://www.that-theatre.com)*