

Educational Material: Sleuth by Anthony Shaffer
Produced for That-Theatre company/Autumn 2008

Teacher's note

“It would seem that we can't get enough of whodunits.” Thus writes Ian Burns in Anglo Files. But why is that? Well, to Burns it is a tough question to answer. However, he likes to believe that “ it's not because as a species we enjoy reading about or watching people suffering” but more a question of us wanting to escape the pressures of real life to plunge into the world of mysteries and suspense.

Teaching crime fiction in the class-room has become increasingly popular over the years. New books have found their ways into the class-room and students seem to like studying the genre of crime fiction and testing their own skills at being the private investigator, the detective etc.

Anthony Shaffer's play “Sleuth” was a phenomenal success when it first appeared in the theatre world on the London stage in 1970. Reviewers found it to be an outstanding performance, and compared it favourably to the works of for instance Agatha Christie.

It may be that Shaffer owes something to the great mystery masters but this being said Shaffer also stands out from the well-known detective playwrights, for with Shaffer everything has been turned upside down. Thus, all effort must be put into solving the clues: Who is the murderer? Who is the victim? Who is the victimizer? What you are to read is a cat and mouse play where Shaffer plays hide and seek with his readers just like Harold Pinter does.

Hope you will enjoy reading and watching the play and that the following material will be of use to you.

All best wishes,

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A. Pre-reading:

Anthony Shaffer and Sleuth

Task: Search the internet and find out information about the life and works of Anthony Shaffer

Task: The title of the play you are going to read is called “Sleuth”. Make a note of all the words and expressions you associate with the word. You may find it useful to draw a mind-map. Look up the concept of the word in a dictionary. What does the word mean? How is it pronounced?

Task: From the title what do you think the play is all about? Write three alternative titles to the story.

Task: Have you read any crime stories? Written by whom? Do you prefer any in favour of others? Why do you like reading crime stories?

Task: Why can't we get enough of crime fiction? Comment on the following quotation; *“It would seem that we can't get enough of whodunits. The audience is a very broad-based one; young and old enjoy playing at being the detective, trying to solve the puzzle of the murder, or murders, in question. Love, danger and death are central motifs in crime fiction”*, (Anglo Files, Ian Burns).

Task: Why do you think that fiction about crime and detection has gradually become a literary genre in its own right? Discuss in class, and if possible reach an agreement.

The Genre and History of Crime Fiction

Task: Write continuously about “crime fiction” for about 5 minutes, preferably without lifting your pen from the paper. Write in full sentences, but do not bother about grammar or spelling.

Task: What elements should a good and exciting crime story contain according to you. Discuss in class, and if possible reach an agreement.

Task: Test your vocabulary about crime stories. Use as your starting point, p.203 in “Whodunit” (see reading list).

Task: Read “A Short History of Crime Fiction”, pp. 170- 178, in “Crime in Fiction” (see reading list). Next, give an outline of the history of crime fiction. Discuss to which period in the history of crime fiction Sleuth belongs?

Task: Read and answer questions to “About Crime Stories”, pp.190-199 in “Whodunit” (see reading list)

Task: Match the words in the column on the left with the definitions on the right (taken from Whodunit p.203-204, see reading list).

Police Constable	spænding
Whodunit	at begå
Suspense	død
Dead	obduktion
Corpse	dødsårsag
To commit	politibetjent
Murder	nekrolog
Murderer	ligsyn
Obituary	politiinspektør
Autopsy	morder
Morgue	mord
Inquest	lighus
Coroner	mordvåben

Murder Weapon
Cause of Death
Chief Superintendent

ligsynsmand
lig
kriminalroman (informal language)

That-theatre's version of Sleuth/Acting-out in Class

Task: Read the article written by Ian Burns (Sleuth – By Anthony Shaffer). What, according to Burns, are the challenges for the actors when doing Sleuth on stage?

Task: Ian Burns claims in his article “Sleuth – By Anthony Shaffer” that a stage version may be even more powerful than a film version. Discuss in class the advantages and disadvantages of a stage version versus a film version?

Task: Improvise a scene between Milo and Marguerite in Sleuth. Write down the scene. Next, act out your scene in class.

Task: Practise acting out the scene between Doppler and Andrew starting with Doppler saying: “So you tortured him? – Andrew: (exploding) Don't you see. It was a game” . Think of intonation and voice.

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

Task: If you had the chance of talking to the actors: Are there any lines in the play that you would like them to explain to you? Is there anything else that you would like to ask them about?

B. The Play – Reading

Description/Plot

Task: Sleuth begins in a rather orthodox way. Why is that? Comment on the very beginning.

Task: The first question one may ask when analysing a crime story is: What happens in the story? Try to single out the essential elements in the action of Sleuth and discuss their relations to the chronology of the story (straightforward narration? flash-backs? flash-forwards?).

Task: Consider the role of descriptive passages and of dialogue in Sleuth.

Task: Give a brief outline of Act 1. Divide the act into sections and give each section a headline. Account for your choice. Next, explain how the dominance and submission relationship between the two characters is established in Act 1.

The Setting, Values, and Function of the Play

Task: In what environment and at what (historical) time does the story take place? What particular class(es) of people is/are depicted in the story? How does the setting vividly reflect the personality of its owner?

Task: Discuss the values and norms implied in the play? Does it support the existing social order or does it express or imply criticism of society? What is the attitude in Sleuth to, for example, crime/the police/sex roles/family patterns/violence/ the role of justice etc?

Characters in the play

Task: Inspector Doppler accuses Andrew of childlike behaviour. Why is that? Next, comment on Andrew's reaction to the accusation?

Task: Comment on the quote by Doppler: "Yes, Sir. You see, we real life detectives aren't as stupid as we are sometimes portrayed by writes like yourself. We may have our pipes, or orchid houses, our shovel hats or deer-stalkers, but we tend to be reasonably effective for all that".

Task: Give a characterization of MiloTindle. Write down and present your character sketch.

Box of useful words: *Young –vitality-Jewish-farmer's daughter- Italian watchmaker- a lower socio-economic status – inferior – owner of a chain of hair-dressers – an outsider – son of a half-Jewish Italian immigrant – ethic difference – brother in intrigue – 35 – slim- dark-haired – medium height – sharp and sallow face – father an Italian....*

Task: Give a characterization of Andre Wyke. Write down and present your character sketch.

Box of useful words: *snob – the dead world of detective stories – old- impotent – racial prejudice –proud – crime writer-calculating – aggressive – heartless – arrogant – domineering – submissive- rational – immature – intelligent – narrow-minded- suspicious – unfair – obstinate – headstrong – firm – assertive – unreliable – two-faded – callous – unkind – foolish – intellectual arrogance – rich- powerful –*

Englishman – manipulating – controlling – strongly built – man of 57 – smoking jacket and black tie.

Task: Discuss in class: Are Milo and Andrew similar in any ways? If so, in what ways? In what ways are Andrew and Milo most dissimilar?

Task: Explain why Milo expresses such contempt for Andrew's detective story universe? What does Andrew himself think of this universe – of himself, as a detective writer?

Task: Why does Andrew suggest that Milo dresses up as a clown? Next, comment on the clown "song" – "The clown is such a happy chap, His nose is painted red, His trousers baggy ..."

Task: What are Andrew's major reasons for wanting to punish and even humiliate Milo. Does he succeed? Why/why not?

Female Characters not introduced but mentioned in the play

Task: The play "Sleuth" mentions female characters without physically introducing them. However, we do get some hints in the play that tell us a little about the women. Use your imagination/ the hints given in the play and write down some key words about Marguerite. What do you think Marguerite is like? Next, use your imagination/ the hints given in the play and write down key-words about Tea. What do you think Tea is like? Next, from these hints give characterizations.

Task: Comment on the relationship between Andrew and his wife. Why is Andrew so worried about her going to live with Milo?

Task: Andrew believes that “Sex is the game with marriage the penalty. Round the board we jog towards each futile anniversary. Pass go. Collect two hundred rows, two hundred silences, two hundred scars in deep places.” Comment on and try to explain this quote.

Task: Discuss the role and presence/ absence of women in detective fiction in general. Why has Agatha Christie’s detective, Miss Marple, for instance become so popular?

Task: Account for the different attitudes to love and women expressed by Milo and Andrew in Sleuth. Support your argumentation by giving textual references.

Task: At a certain point Milo seems to defend Marguerite. Why is that? What is your personal attitude to the way Andrew seems to treat his wife. Andrew says himself that “he wants to be rid of her for life, not just a two week Tindle Tour...” Why is it that we, as readers, do not trust Andrew in this case?

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

Task: Andrew seems to live in a fictitious game-playing world of his own. Discuss when Andrew crosses the line between imagination and grim reality? In other words when does Andrew take fiction for fact and act upon it?

Task: What is/becomes Andrew's motivation for the game he plays with Milo? What do his games and the power he holds in these games become a substitute for? Next, find evidence in the text, which support the view that Andrew takes a sick interest in game playing?

Task: Find textual references where Milo actually notices Andrew's unhealthy obsession with game-playing. How does the game-playing, according to Milo, reflect the true state of Andrew's life?

Task: What becomes Milo's motivation for participating in Andrew's game-playing? Why does Milo agree to the plan of "stealing" some jewels from Andrew? What does that tell us about Milo? Next, discuss whether Milo is a game-player in the sense that Andrew is? Why/why not?

Task: Throughout the play we find many references to games/game-playing. In pairs find and write down as many references as possible.

Style and Language

Task: Characterize the style and language of the play. What is so special about Shaffer's language? Give examples from the text. What do Andrew's and Milo's choices of words reveal about them as characters?

Task: Find places where Andrew seems to talk down to Milo – and the other way around. Describe the language used.

Task: Does the language used by the characters in the story tell us something about their social background? If so, give examples.

A Study of Black Humour or a Comedy Thriller?

Task: Give examples where the reader/the audience willingly laughs at the many exchanges between Andrew and Milo. What else brings forth the humour and wit in Sleuth?

Task: What is it that brings an abrupt end to both comedy and laughter in Sleuth?

Task: When talking about Sleuth critics seem to mention especially Andrew's use of black humour. Find examples of this use.

A Question of Genre and Suspense?

Purpose of the play.

Traditional and non-traditional detective genre.

Good verses evil.

Not a whodunit but a whodunwhat.

The ending of the play.

Fiction or non-fiction?

This material will be made available after the production.

C. Post-reading

Pro and against Sleuth – an overall discussion

Task: Find three interesting sentences in Sleuth. Next, write your immediate response to each sentence and argue for your choice. In pairs: Compare, and if possible, reach an agreement.

Task: Point out/choose one quotation from the box of quotations which would seem to be the play's most important one? In pairs, compare and, if possible, reach an agreement.

Quotations:

“For Christ’s sake, Andrew, this is not a detective story, this is real life. You are talking of doing a real murder. Of killing a real man – don’t you understand”

“Come, little man, did you really believe I would give up my wife and jewels to you? That I would make myself that ridiculous?”

“She is mine whether I love her or not. I found her, I’ve kept her. I am familiar with her. And once, she was in love with me”.

“No. Most people want someone to live with. But you have no life to give anyone – only tricks and the shadows of long ago. Take a look at yourself”.

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

Task: Discuss. Is the detective story a suitable medium to express criticism against society? Is there any form of criticism of society expressed in Sleuth?

D.Creative Writing:

Task: Write a speech where you either defend or approve of Andrew’s life. Think of how you build up your arguments. Present your speech in class.

Task: Write an essay about crime fiction. Your starting lines are as follows: “We simply can’t get enough of crime fiction, and I don’t know the reason for this. I like to hope that it’s not because we as a species enjoy reading about or watching people suffering. I prefer to believe that deep down we tend to believe that”

Task: The passage below is from a new book titled “Crime in Fiction”, (see reading list). Divide the passage into three paragraphs. Formulate a question for each of the three paragraphs.

“Crime has become a very popular genre today. A lot of programmes on television are about or related to crime. Programmes such as CSI, Medical Detectives and Numbers are given prime time, and the impact of film and television on the development of the genre is not to be missed. Due to the archetypes of characters which these media use the reader/viewer is not led astray. The characters are easily recognisable and there is almost never any doubt about who is the bad guy or the good guy. The settings of the stories are often a bit gloomy, thus suggesting the general atmosphere of the plot. The main characters face a challenge which might turn out to be a matter of life and death. The reason behind the popularity of the genre may be man’s inborn curiosity for the unknown, or rather, our fascination with the dark side of the human mind, as well as it may be modern man’s way of coping with the modern world. So, the genre is still alive and kicking, presenting us with a picture of life and death, and at the same time reminding us of our own mortality”.

Task: Write a paragraph (about 150 words) in which you argue for a wider reading of crime fiction in the class-room. State your main point in the first sentence and signpost your supporting arguments with appropriate linkers.

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

Task: Turn Sleuth into a short story about love and hate.

Task: Try to put yourself in Marguerite’s shoes. Write a letter to your husband Andrew telling him that you are sick and tired of him living in a world of his own, and that you have begun seeing another man ... Your first line has been given: Dear Andrew, I am so tired of living together with a man who only seems to care about himself, it must come to an end now, because otherwise

Task: Write a blurb in English directed at a Danish audience. Your primary concern is how you would sell the play in Denmark. Write down three points you would like to include in your blurb and before writing find arguments for including the points.

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 begin 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: Turn Sleuth into a classical whodunit crime/detective story. Create e.g. a detective and explain how he solves the crime.

Task: Imagine you are a famous journalist. Your next job is to prepare an interview with a famous writer of detective stories e.g. Agatha Christie. Your job is to write down questions that you would like to ask her. Your final product is an article in a crime magazine about Agatha Christie.

Task: Letter to the editor: *Dear Madam. My name is Milo. I am in love with a married woman and I want to marry her. But I am very much in doubt if I can live up to her standards of living and provide her with the luxury she is used to. What shall I do? Yours sincerely, Milo.* Write an answer to Milo.

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? (Please don't give the game away)

Translate from Danish into English and vice versa

Task: Translate the extract from a film review written by Ebbe Iversen, Berlingske Tidende 30.11.2007, into English: *“Den ene er rig og begavet, men aldrig. Den anden er ung og attraktiv, men fattig. De er rivaler og kæmper om en kvinde. Eller gør de? Det bliver et åbent spørgsmål i denne nye filmatisering af Anthony Shaffers diabolske skuespil Sleuth om den velhavende kriminalforfatter Andrew Wyke, som i*

sit statelige herresæde ude på landet opsøges af den unge Milo, der inde i London, har en affære med Wykes kone og nu vil have forfatteren til at give hende en skilsmisse. Eller vil han?"

"Ny krimi – Forfatteren Elizabeth George har for nylig udgivet en bloddryppende krimi, som på dansk har fået titlen Hyænens nat. Handlingen foregår på et skotsk herresæde, der nu er hotelpension. Her samles et teaterselskab fra London for at drøfte et kontroversielt nyt skuespil. Allerede den første morgen findes stykkets smukke forfatterinde myrdet i sin seng. Hvad der ligger bag dette og et følgende mord, skal den adeligt fødte kriminalassistent Lynley og hans yderst folkelige overbetjent Barbara – Alle kommer under mistanke, adelige hemmeligheder står på spil, jalousien blomstrer, men til sidst reddes Scotland Yards ære på overraskende vis. Et overordentligt underholdende gyst til ledige stunder", (kilde: Øvelser og oversættelser, Gas, Højt niveau 2)

Task: Translate the extract from a new book on Crime fiction (see reading list): *"The reasons behind the popularity of the genre may be man's inborn curiosity of the unknown, or rather, our fascination with the dark side of the human mind, as well as it may be modern man's way of coping with the modern world. So, the genre is still alive and kicking, presenting us with a picture of life and death, and at the same time reminding us of our own mortality. ...It is difficult to define crime fiction as the idea of crime covers a great variety of sub-genres....However, a definition might be that crime fiction deals with crimes, their detection, criminals, and their motives".*

Language and Grammar tasks

Task: Find the adjectives in the following extract: "From: (Milo throws paper into the air in a great cloud) Ah! A super snowstorm. That's very good. We'll let my accountants sort that out later. I can't think why Marguerite is devoted to it. (He picks a china ornament off the mantelpiece and hurls it across the room). Until: Here, steady on, old man".

Task: The following extract is written in the past tense. Turn it into the present tense: "Andrew: With alacrity. I persuaded him to get out of his clothes and to dress as

Grock, in which ludicrous disguise he broke into the house and blew open the safe. Hen then pocketed the jewels, struggled, convincingly..... dressing gown”

Task: Find the many linkers used in the play. Next, discuss the function of these linkers.

Dear Teachers,

There is more educational material that has relevance directly to Act 11. If you're desperate for it then please ask me by sending an e-mail to: Ian@burns.to

Meanwhile...

Further Reading

Ohlnad, Hanne et al, “Whodunit – en historisk krimiantologi til engelskundervisningen”, Kaleidoscope, 1993. p. 190, ”Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories”

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Ballentine Books, 1990

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