



Plays and Pinot: A Chorus of Disapproval

Synopsis

A diffident widower attempts to escape loneliness by joining the local amateur light operatic society. By accident rather than by design (in fact, by not saying “no” to anything be it a request to obtain confidential information from his company or an offer of illicit sex) he advances from a small part to the lead.

About the Playwright

Alan Ayckbourn, in full Sir Alan Ayckbourn, (born April 12, 1939, London, England), is a successful and prolific British playwright, whose works—mostly farces and comedies—deal with marital and class conflicts and point out the fears and weaknesses of the English lower-middle class. He wrote more than 80 plays and other entertainments, most of which were first staged at the Stephen Joseph Theatre in Scarborough, Yorkshire, England. At age 15 Ayckbourn acted in school productions of William Shakespeare, and he began his professional acting career with the Stephen Joseph Company in Scarborough. When Ayckbourn wanted better roles to play, Joseph told him to write a part for himself in a play that the company would mount if it had merit. Ayckbourn produced his earliest plays in 1959–61 under the pseudonym Roland Allen. His plays—many of which were performed years before they were published—included *Relatively Speaking* (1968), *Mixed Doubles: An Entertainment on Marriage* (1970), *How the Other Half Loves* (1971), the trilogy *The Norman Conquests* (1973), *Absurd Person Singular* (1974), *Intimate Exchanges* (1985), *Mr. A’s Amazing Maze Plays* (1989), *Body Language* (1990), *Invisible Friends* (1991), *Communicating Doors* (1995), *Comic Potential* (1999), *The Boy Who Fell into a Book* (2000), and the trilogy *Damsels in Distress* (2002). In 2002 he published a work of advice and instruction for aspiring playwrights and directors, *The Crafty Art of Playmaking*. After suffering a stroke in 2006, Ayckbourn limited his activities, though he soon resumed writing. In 2009 he stepped down as artistic director of the Stephen Joseph Theatre, a post he had held since 1972. He later directed (2014) a musical version of *The Boy Who Fell into a Book*. His numerous honours include Laurence Olivier (2009) and Tony (2010) awards for lifetime achievement. Ayckbourn was knighted in 1997.

Characters

Guy Jones (late 30s/40s)

Guy Jones is the protagonist of *A Chorus of Disapproval*, yet he is a curiously faceless character. His chief characteristic is his passivity; in fact it is his passive acceptance of other peoples’ plans for him that propels him to centre stage. Guy has recently been widowed. He decides a change is in order and joins the local musical society. Guy works for the multi-national firm BLM in “a rather small local branch in a rather obscure department called Alternative Forward Costing.” Although he is clearly not a mover or a shaker, Guy’s insider position within BLM makes him the focus of interest for greedy cast members. Initially allocated a one-line part as Crook-Fingered Jack in John Gay’s eighteenth-century musical *The Beggar’s Opera*, Guy soon advances through the ranks, aided by recalcitrant actors and scheming actresses, until he wins the lead role of Macheath. He has a somewhat superficial affair with one of the cast members, Fay, and also embarks upon a more serious affair with his co-star, Hannah, who plays Polly. This relationship has dramatic consequences



for Guy, Hannah, and her husband, Llewellyn; as the curtain falls, Guy has not only lost his job at BLM, he has also managed to alienate all of the cast members.

Dafydd ap Llewellyn (40s/50s)

The energetic Dafydd is on-stage almost as often as Guy Jones, and although Guy is the focus of the play, Dafydd's role is in many ways far more interesting. Dafydd is a lawyer whose real passion is the theatre. He longs to work with better actors than those that the local musical society PALOS provides, but he makes up for their lack of talent with his own enthusiasm. Dafydd's passion for the theatre—and his pride in all things Welsh—contrasts with his passionless marriage. Although he loves his wife Hannah, he neglects her, and their relationship is not satisfying physically. The revelation that Hannah and Guy have been having an affair is devastating to him; nonetheless, at the curtain call, he graciously thanks Guy for playing Macheath at such short notice.

Hannah Llewellyn (40s/50s)

Hannah is married to Dafydd. A generous and loving woman and the mother of twin girls, she feels neglected and occasionally patronized by her husband. Everything in the Llewellyn household is Welsh, Hannah tells Guy in Act I, "except me." Hannah even goes so far as to wonder if she would be missed if she died. It is these feelings of neglect that propel her into an affair with Guy, whose politeness and attentiveness are a pleasant change for her. Hannah plays Polly Peachum in the PALOS production of *The Beggar's Opera*, and her role, as well as her marital problems, make her something of a tragi-comic figure. At the end of the play, Hannah gambles all on Guy's love, offering to leave her marriage and her children for him, but he rejects her. It is unclear how her relationship with Dafydd will develop, but it is clear that Guy's presence in her life has changed her irrevocably.

Bridget Baines (Young-ish)

Bridget is the daughter of the local publican. Bridget's official position at PALOS is stage manager and script prompt. In *A Chorus of Disapproval* she also parallels the character of Lucy, the publican's daughter in *The Beggar's Opera*. She is a rather ill-tempered young woman who manages to intimidate friends and foes alike with her physical aggression. Bridget's appearances usually centre on her affair with Crispin and her hostility towards her rival, Linda. Her big scene comes in Act II, when she provokes Linda to tears.

Crispin Usher (Young-ish)

Crispin is a tough, hostile young man who originally lands the part of Macheath in the PALOS production. Like Macheath, Crispin "runs" two women at the same time: Bridget and Linda. His big scene occurs in Act II, when he comes to blows with Dafydd, then cheerfully throws the towel in, thus leaving the company without its lead actor.

Enid Washbrook (40s)

Enid is a timid, unobtrusive, older woman, Linda's beleaguered mother.

Ted Washbrook (40s)

Husband to Enid and doting father to Linda. Washed out. Originally cast as Matt the Mint in *The Beggar's Opera* until he storms out of rehearsals and Guy takes over the role.

Linda Washbrook (Young-ish)

Linda is the daughter of Ted and Enid and has only a smidgen more character than her washed-out parents. She plays Lucy in *The Beggar's Opera* and acts out the part in real life by competing with



Bridget for Crispin's affection. Unlike Bridget, who manages to match Crispin in the toughness stakes, Linda is not really up to the part nor to battles with her rival. In Act II she is flummoxed by Bridget's provocative behaviour and collapses in tears.

Mr. Ames (Older)

Mr. Ames is PALOS's shy piano-player. His personality is in direct contrast to Dafydd's. He only has a few lines of spoken dialogue.

Fay Hubbard (30s)

Fay is an attractive, sophisticated thirty-something woman. Ayckbourn describes her as "one of the local younger married jet-set." Fay calmly embarks upon an affair with Guy and lands him the part of Filch, assuming that he will then provide her with financially lucrative information about the supposed BLM land scam. She perceives their relationship as a "deal" and threatens Guy when he appears to renege on his side of it.

Ian Hubbard (30s)

Ian is an ambitious thirty-something man, married to the very attractive Fay. The couple are determined to advance in the world. Ian owns a building firm, which is his excuse for wanting to buy Jarvis's land, but it is more probable that he and the Huntley-Pikes hope to inflate the land's price and then sell it at a profit. He resigns his role as Filch in order to secure Guy's help in the scam, and reluctantly agrees to Fay's partner-swapping arrangement. When Guy misunderstands the arrangement and brings along an elderly woman friend to the

Hubbard household, Ian is humiliated. He has his revenge when he reveals Guy and Hannah's affair to Dafydd in Act II.

Jarvis Huntley-Pike (50s)

"Mad" but "harmless," Jarvis owns the land that is the subject of so much wheeling and dealing in A Chorus of Disapproval. In his late-fifties, he is a British Northerner, prone to making bad jokes and enamoured with the sound of his own voice. Jarvis's misreading of Guy—his belief that Guy is a Scotsman, based solely on the fact that when he first sees him Guy is holding a beer in one hand and a whiskey in the other—generates a good deal of humour throughout the play. Jarvis's longest appearance is in Act II, when he tells Guy a story about his philanthropic, religious grandfather, the first owner of the land, who built a cricket pitch for his workers on the land but destroyed it after he saw them playing cricket on a Sunday.

Rebecca Huntley-Pike (40s)

Rebecca is the wife of the jovial Jarvis. Younger than her husband, she shares his predilection for alcohol. Her major appearances are in the rehearsal sequence in Act I and the conversation she has with Guy in her garden in Act II. In all probability, Rebecca is the source of the rumours about BLM expanding. Just as Fay procures Guy a better part in the play, Rebecca procures him the part of Macheath. Just as Fay expects Guy to do her a favour in return, so too does Rebecca. She and her husband are nonetheless disappointed in their schemes.

References: *Britannica.com*