



## **Plays and Pinot: Habeas Corpus**

### **Synopsis**

The aging Dr. Arthur Wicksteed pursues his nubile patient, Felicity Rumpers. Wicksteed's wife Muriel lusts after the charming head of the BMA, Sir Percy Shorter. Shorter as well as being Wicksteed's old rival, turns out to be Felicity's father - the result of an under-the-table liaison during an air-raid with Lady Rumpers, her mother. Meanwhile, Wicksteed's spinster-sister Connie, ashamed of her flat-chestedness, has schemes of her own. Like some saucy Magill seaside postcard as retouched by Magritte, or an end-of-the-pier romp reorganised by Orton, the piece shows how a collection of stock types from Hove find themselves propelled into the permissive society with the arrival of a false-breast fitter from Leatherhead. Identities are mistaken, the wrong knockers admirably fondled, and libidos burst out of enforced hibernation.

### **About the Playwright**

Alan Bennett, (born May 9, 1934, Leeds, Yorkshire, England), is a British playwright who was best known for *The Madness of George III* (1991) and *The History Boys* (2004). His work fearlessly scrutinized the British class system, propriety, and England's north-south cultural divide with results that were simultaneously chilling and hilarious. Bennett attended Leeds Modern School and gained a scholarship to Exeter College, Oxford, where he received an undergraduate degree in history in 1957. His fledgling career as a junior lecturer in history at Magdalen College, Oxford, was cut short after he enjoyed enormous success with the comedy revue *Beyond the Fringe* in 1960. He coauthored and starred in the show with Peter Cook, Jonathan Miller, and Dudley Moore, and the foursome played to packed houses in Edinburgh, London, and New York City. Bennett's first play, *Forty Years On*, was produced in 1968 and starred John Gielgud. It was followed by numerous plays, films, and television serials as well as several pieces for radio. In 1987 *Talking Heads*, a series of monologues for television, made him a household name and earned him the first of six Laurence Olivier Awards (annual theatre awards established in 1976 as the Society of West End Theatre Awards). *The Madness of George III* premiered at the National Theatre in 1991, and the 1994 film adaptation, *The Madness of King George*, secured several Academy Award nominations, including one for Bennett's screenplay. Bennett's special talent was his translation of the mundane into tragicomic dramas, and he was able to employ his characteristic light touch even when writing about intellectual heavyweights such as Ludwig Wittgenstein or Franz Kafka. His gift for creating an authentic dialogue for the "ordinary people" of his own background sat curiously beside his ability to portray the manners of middle and upper classes. It was Bennett's diversity of talent that delighted audiences and led critics to hail him as one of the premier playwrights of the day. Bennett's play *The History Boys* garnered both the Critics' Circle Theatre Award and the Laurence Olivier Award for best new play, and Bennett also received the Olivier Special Award. Set in Yorkshire in the 1980s, the play featured a clash of values between two teachers coaching a class of state-school boys through their university entrance examinations. It succeeded both as a serious-minded critique of Britain's education system—then and now—and as a superbly comic entertainment. A 2006 film version of *The History Boys* followed the play, which won six Tony Awards after its debut on Broadway in the same year. Bennett's later plays included *The Habit of Art* (2009), which explores issues of aging and creativity through an imagined encounter between the poet W.H. Auden and the composer



Benjamin Britten. In *People* (2012) an aristocratic former model whose wealth is gone must decide what to do with her family's dilapidated home. Set in the geriatric ward of an embattled Yorkshire hospital, *Allelujah!* (2018) was viewed as a critique on Britain's National Health Service. Bennett also published various books, including several novellas and short-story collections. He adapted the eponymous short story from the collection *The Lady in the Van* (1990) for the stage in 1999 and film in 2015. A best-selling collection of his diaries and reminiscences, titled *Writing Home*, appeared in 1994. In the memoir *Untold Stories* (2005), he looked back affectionately at his parents, poignantly reflected on his mother's descent into senility and her death in a nursing home, and revealed for the first time that he had received treatment for what had been believed to be terminal cancer. *Keep On Keeping On*, a selection of his diary entries from 2005 to 2015, was published in 2016.

### **Characters**

#### **Arthur Wicksteed**

Randy general practitioner

#### **Muriel Wicksteed**

His wife. Frustrated, hot to trot

#### **Dennis Wicksteed**

Their Son. Hypochondriacal

#### **Constance Wicksteed**

The Doctor's sister. Flat chested, sex starved

#### **Canon Throbbing**

A celibate. Sexually deranged

#### **Mr Shanks**

A Sales Rep. Much put upon

#### **Sir Percy Shorter**

A leading light in the medical profession. Height challenged, pompous

#### **Lady Rumpers**

A White settler. Haughty

#### **Felicity Rumpers**

Nubile, teenage daughter to Lady Rumpers

#### **Mr Purdue**

A sick man. Always suicidal

#### **Mrs Swabb**

The Cleaning lady. Narrator and facilitator to the Wicksteed family

***References: Britannica.com***