

Huntington

THEATRE COMPANY

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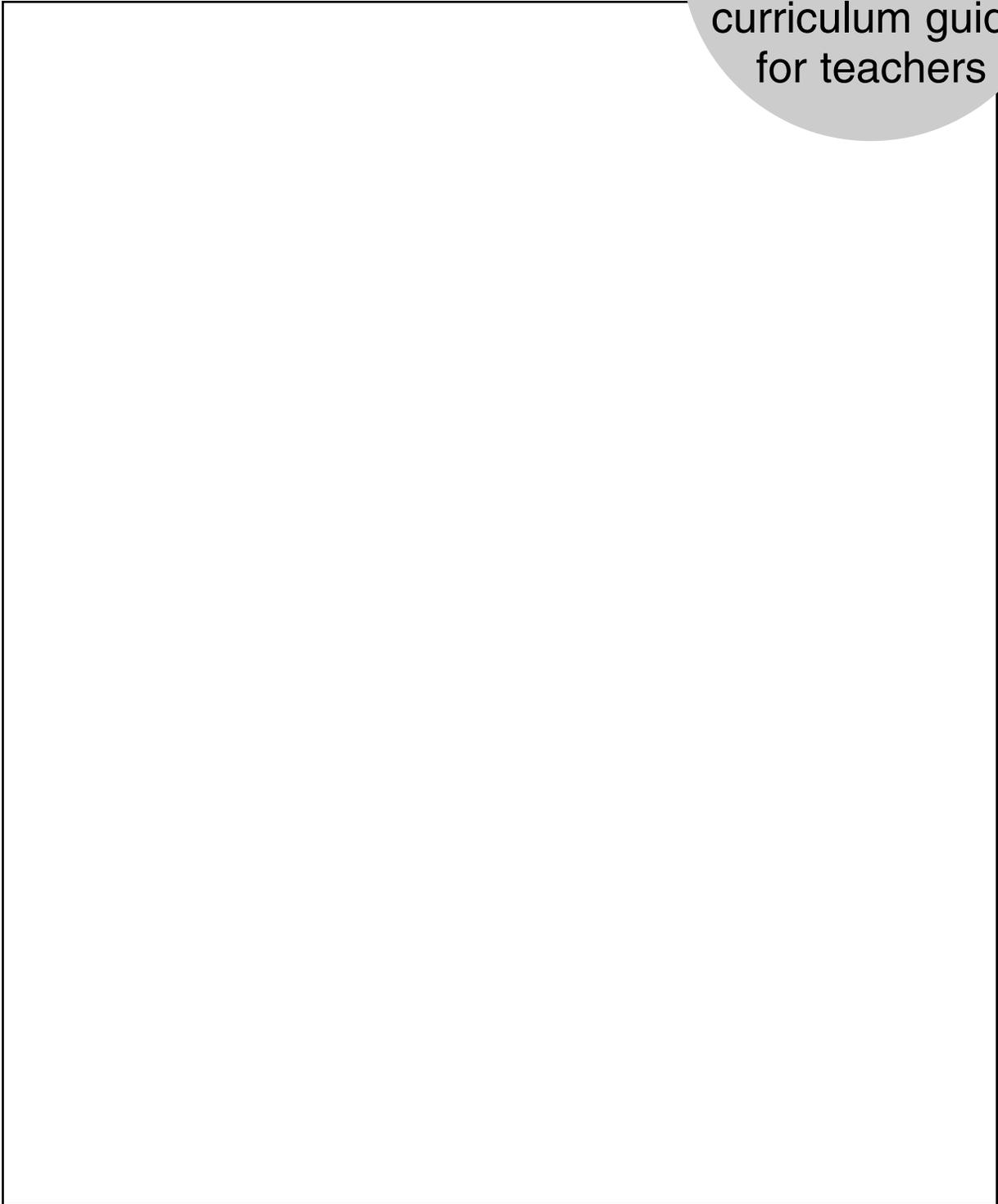
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Limelight

literary and
curriculum guide
for teachers



TEACHER LITERARY AND CURRICULUM GUIDE

Butley

by **Simon Gray**
Directed by **Nicholas Martin**

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BUTLEY



SYNOPSIS

Butley

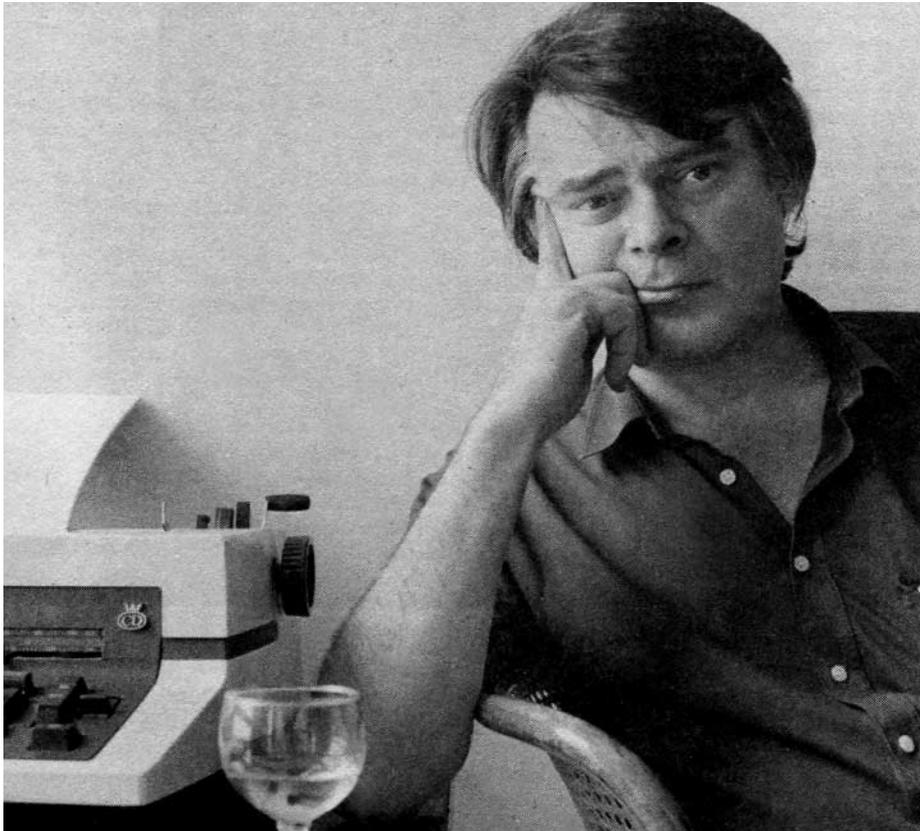
It's a bad day for Ben Butley, a middle-aged, train-wreck of an English professor who prefers nursery rhymes over Byron, and afternoon drinks over meeting with students — unless of course they're attractive young men with fiery intellects.

Joey — former student, sometime lover, current office-mate, housemate, and colleague to Butley — is moving out. And not just out of the office, but out of the flat where they share an on-again off-again relationship, mostly mitigated by Butley's fluctuating marital status. Even more stinging are Joey's choices of new companions. It turns out he's moving to share office space near Edna Shaft, the somewhat dotty literature professor who, after twenty years, has finally finished a scholarly tome on Byron and found a publisher. Butley's disdain for her is so keen that he sets her up for a professional fall, but he's too far gone to even carry that off properly. However, Joey's personal life is the true stake through the heart, as his new lover, Reg, appears in Butley's office to explain the situation in the most frank of terms, severing the toxic ties from which Joey is unable to extricate himself.

Adding to his trauma is Butley's estranged wife, Anne, who chooses this afternoon to request a divorce. She has left him, and taken their infant daughter with her. She's of course free to move on, and Butley even wishes her well, until he finds she's left him for Tom — “the most boring man in London,” and friend to Reg. It is too much to bear. The incessant interruptions from Miss Heasman, a student determined to get the education she paid for, push Butley to the brink. It is the final arrival of Mr. Gardner, however, that drives home for Butley the depths to which he's sunk. A petulant student and unwitting pawn in the machinations against Edna Shaft, Mr. Gardner is not only the object of Butley's desire, but a mirror image of Joey as a young student under Butley's tutelage. It is in the moment of intellectual seduction that Butley finally realizes that he is doing nothing more than traveling in ever-smaller circles, repeating the mistakes of his past, while the world outside moves inexorably forward, leaving him unsteady in its wake. ●

GRAY'S ACADEMY

Dark Comedies of Bad Manners



Simon Gray

"[There is a] thin line walked by Gray's middle-aged male protagonists, who are witty, detached, disintegrating, foolish, self-destructive, sexually ambivalent, and often artistic. ... These anti-heroes [not only] reflect the disintegration of a society they inhabit, but often reflect on it in ways that both amuse and deeply disturb." — Katherine H. Burkman

Simon Gray is proud to declare himself an academic. It is a world in which he's worked since age 22 — five years before he wrote his first play. Over the last 45 years, he has held lectureships in universities from Canada to France and England, and from his plays, it's easy to see he's an expert on the political

maneuvering and professional backstabbing so common in university English departments. Gray himself asserts, "I went to university when I was seventeen and I never left."

The majority of Gray's plays feature middle-aged men, often literature professors, heading down the tubes. His other works focus on the

world of publishing — another venue in which Gray has much experience. Gray has set his more than 35 plays so frequently in these two professions that, within such proscribed frameworks, he is able to execute exacting character studies, building up the little worlds that surround his anti-heroes, letting them slowly crumble, and watching them slough through the detritus of their lives.

Butley — first produced in London in 1971, starring the inimitable Alan Bates, and directed by Harold Pinter — has been Gray's

Gray himself asserts, "I went to university when I was seventeen and I never left."

most successful work. Some critics assert that it is precisely because he holds on as dearly to the university system as his title character does. Indeed, it is dedicated to "the staff and students, past, present, and future, of the English Department, Queen Mary College, London." Taking advantage of the sometimes claustrophobic world of academia, *Butley* is set entirely in the cramped and squalid joint office of Ben Butley — an aging, disinterested, lump of mediocrity — and Joey Keyston, the closest thing Butley has to a colleague, friend, or lover. Focusing on the self-imposed isolation of the human condition, Gray explores every facet of Ben Butley, every choice, every failure. And he does it all with an unmatched, self-effacing, exceedingly dry wit. ●

NATHAN LANE

A Short Biography



Nathan Lane

Nathan Lane, the sublimely gifted actor of both stage and screen, will grace the Huntington stage this winter as the eponymous anti-hero of Simon Gray's *Butley*. Born Joe Lane in 1950s

New Jersey, he took his stage name from Nathan Detroit of *Guys and Dolls* — a role he would later play to great critical acclaim, winning a Tony Nomination, and a Drama Desk and Outer Critics Circle Award in the process. Recently, Lane created the role of Max Bialystock to similar acclaim in the Broadway smash hit *The Producers*. Other notable Broadway credits include *The Man Who Came to Dinner* at the Roundabout Theatre Company, Max Prince in Neil Simon's *Laughter on the 23rd Floor*, and the starring role in *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*. Lane received two more Drama Desk Awards for performances in two Terrence McNally plays: *The Lisbon Traviata* and *Love! Valour! Compassion!*, the latter also earning him an Obie

Award. In 1992, he was honored with another Obie, this time it was the prestigious Award for Sustained Excellence. Among his many Off Broadway credits are *She Stoops to Conquer*, *The Common Pursuit*, *The Film Society*, *Measure for Measure*, and *In a Pig's Valise*. His film roles include *The Birdcage* (Golden Globe Nomination), *Ironweed*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *Love's Labors Lost*, *Isn't She Great*, *Love! Valour! Compassion!*, *Mouse Hunt*, *Addams Family Values*, *Life with Mikey*, *Frankie and Johnny*, and *Joe vs. The Volcano*. He has lent his voice to several animated characters, the most famous of these being Timon in *The Lion King*. Nathan Lane is truly a virtuoso of the modern stage, and is sure to delight in Simon Gray's darkly comic drama. 🍷

A Dramatic Lineage — Simon Gray's influences, from Ibsen to Shaw

An excerpt from "Hedda's Children" in the book *Simon Gray: A Casebook*, by scholar Katherine H. Burkman:

There is "a proliferation of characters created by modern playwrights who have been deeply influenced in their writing by Ibsen's heroine [Hedda Gabler]... and by Ibsen's point of view. Among Hedda's descendants are such characters as Regina in Lillian Hellman's *Little Foxes*, Susan in David Hare's *Plenty*, and Jessie in Marsha Norman's *Night Mother*. Simon Gray, who infuses many of his Ibsenite characters with a good dose of Shavian wit, seems to be particularly haunted by Hedda's ghost, although it is his male protagonists, rather than his [secondary] heroines, who would seem to be her descendants, Hedda's children.

"Ben Butley... is in many ways the very incarnation of Hedda. An English University don, who despises his fellow academics, his students, and his wife, he is filled with Hedda's kind of self-hatred for remaining a cowardly part of a world for which he has such disdain. He is unsaved by the Shavian wit with which he lacerates those who approach him, partly because, like Hedda, he knows that he is tainted by that which he despises. ...As Butley's behind-the-scenes machinations and sniping confrontations catch up with him, he ends up as isolated and desperate as Hedda, and almost as self-destructive."

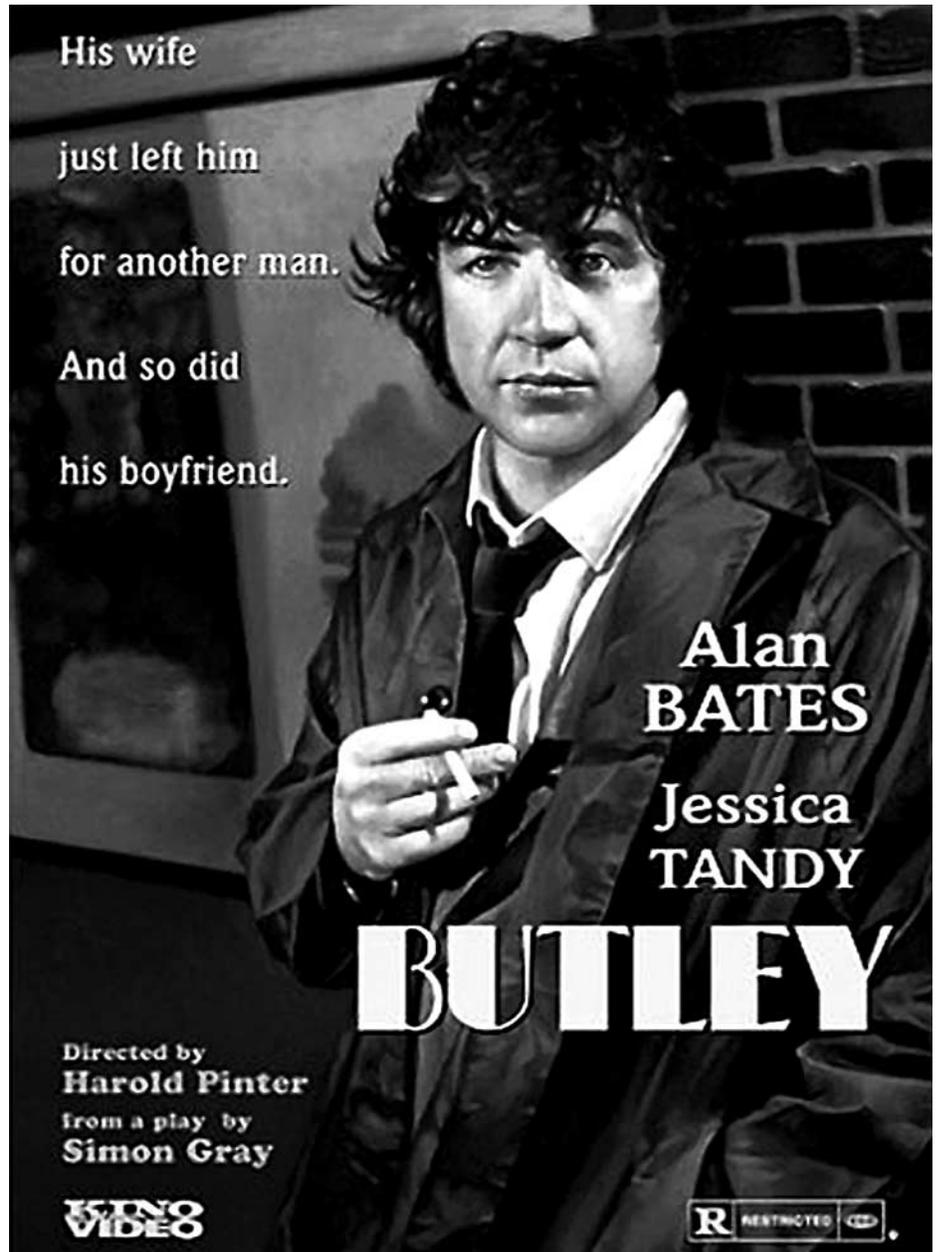
NOTES ON THE Original Productions

Butley premiered in London's West End on July 14, 1971, where it played to great acclaim for six months. The strong cast, which included Alan Bates in the career-defining role of the play's anti-hero, was directed by Harold Pinter. The next year, the production transferred to New York, and *Butley* made its Broadway debut at the Morosco Theatre on October 31,

"I remember being shocked that Bates had to do the performance again.... And I thought, 'How can he do that? How can he go through all that again?'"

1972. Bates was heralded by the New York critics as turning in one of the best performances of the season. In the November 1972 *Playbill* Magazine, Bates offered this analysis of the character people love to loathe:

"I've always felt [*Butley*] was marvelous to play, but I haven't always liked him. I've been amused by him, entertained, but I feel much more kindly towards him now. He has a compulsive, destructive thing born out of his own frustrations and inadequacies. He abuses everyone around him, insults them, tries



Reproduction of original *Butley* poster

to ruin everything for them and doesn't succeed at any point, except for making them suffer a kind of humiliation which they are aware of, but from which they can walk away. ...He thinks he has dam-

aged them, but they're still intact. While he seems to be destroying everyone around him, he's really strengthening them by encouraging them to turn their backs on him. To play him well, it's not nec-

essary to like him.”

Harold Pinter, famed playwright, said of his desire to direct *Butley*, “I wanted to do the play in the first place because it seemed to me to have such verve, such mastery of language, and the central character was, I thought, such a remarkable man. I found the play ferocious, very witty, very sad.”

Nathan Lane, set to star in the Huntington’s production, also had strong feelings about *Butley*. In a 1997 interview for *The Dallas Morning News*, Lane recounted the following anecdote regarding how he developed a passion for acting at an early age, and the transformative power of *Butley*’s title role:

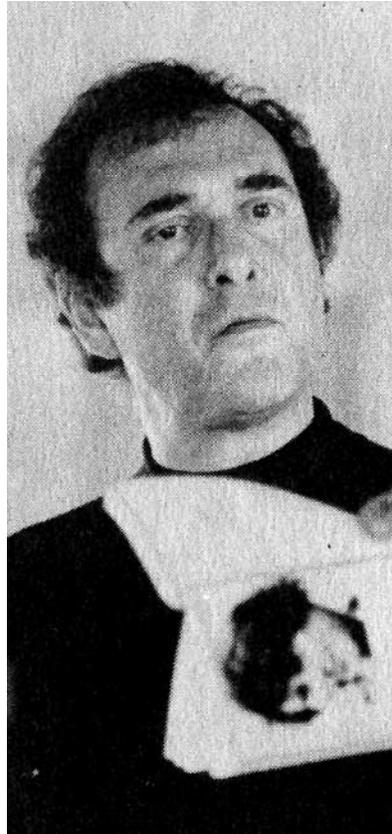
“My oldest brother took me to see my first Broadway show. I was about 11 years old. And I thought,



Alan Bates as *Butley*, by Al Hershfeld

‘That’s what I’m going to do when I grow up.’ That first play was called *Black Comedy*. Then my brother took me to see a matinee performance of *Butley* with Alan Bates. I remember being shocked that Bates had to do the performance again. My brother said, ‘You know, he’ll have to go back to the theater and do it again in the evening.’ And I thought, ‘How can he do that? How can he go through all that again?’” ●

Simon Gray, on *Butley* and Teaching



Harold Pinter directing with a Simon Gray script in hand

In August of 1972 – between the close of Butley in London, and its New York premiere – Simon Gray spoke with Peter Anson of Plays & Players. He offered insight to the play’s inner workings, as well as his own life as a career academic.

[The play] is meant to be jocular. But I do sometimes suspect that there’s something innately dangerous in the teaching of English when the teacher is not primarily an academic. For instance I hope there’s enough in *Butley* to show that at one time he must have been a marvelous teacher. If his energy and sharpness had been directed towards a text, for example, he would have become a much less destructive person. One would have liked to have heard him in his early twenties on, say,

Shakespeare or even Eliot. But literary criticism is not a sufficient activity for a man who can never come to terms with himself or control his relations with others. There’s bound to be a revolt from literature as inadequate for what *Butley* so desperately needs – the revolt would express itself in the most anarchic way. I think that every teacher, even an Edna, must occasionally shudder at the idea of talking to a student about *Coriolanus* or Chaucer when all you want is your [cigarette] and cup of coffee.

...Being a teacher is a continuous mask...*Butley* uses life as his theatre. He’s a very theatrical personality. But *Butley* has taken his mask off and says, ‘Face it – this is what I feel all the time’ – about teaching at least. Often teachers never take their masks off – they become the teacher at home or in their private relationships. ...[After the success of *Butley*] I suppose I could give it up. But teaching is so deeply a habit with me that I’m not sure if I could face life without it. But the day when I discover, like *Butley*, that I can’t bear to teach – I’ll know it’s time to stop.

GRAY CHRONOLOGY

The Highlights

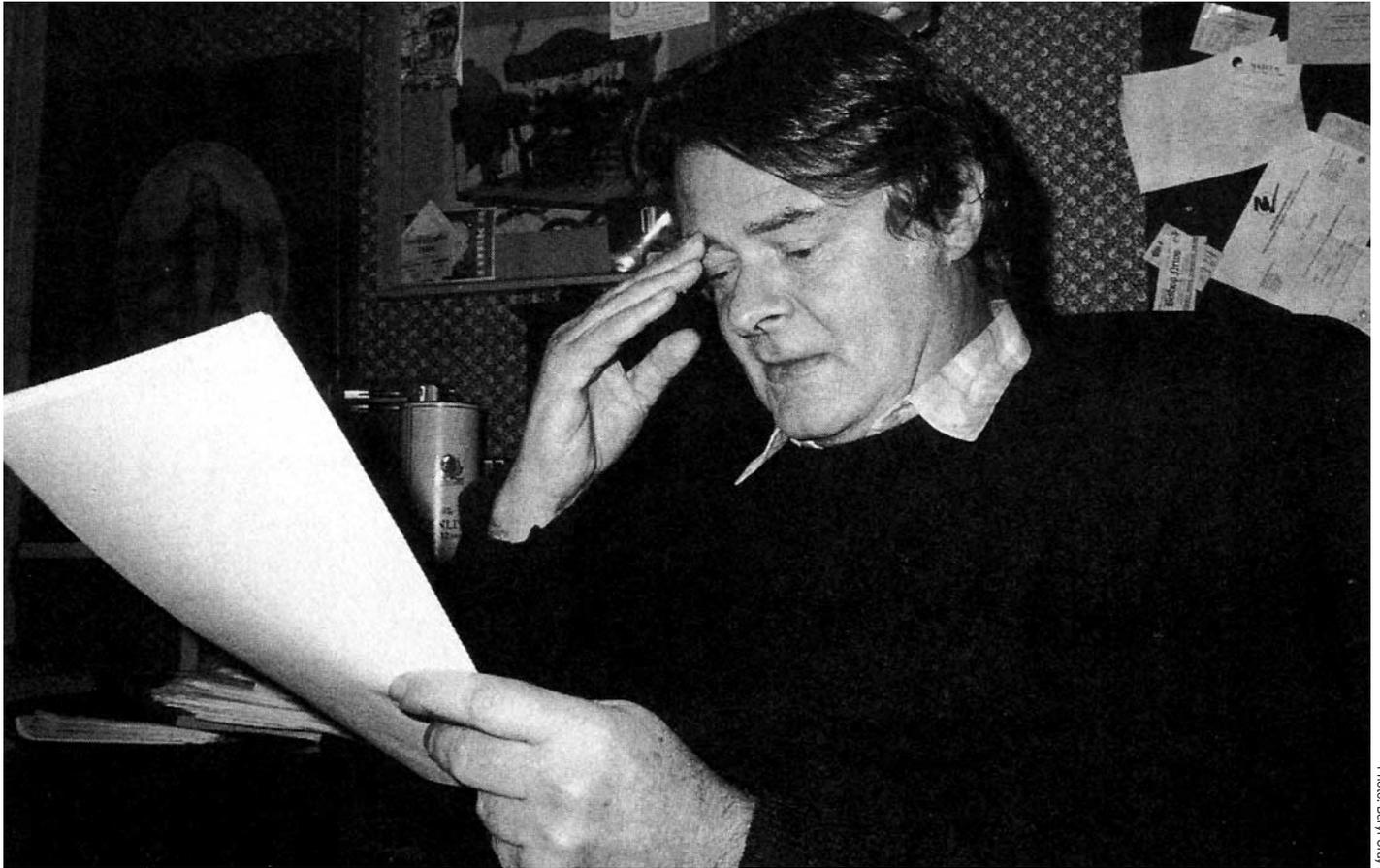


Photo: Beryl Gray

The playwright at work

- 1936** Born on Hayling Island, England.
- 1958** Takes first lectureship at a university in France.
- 1959** Attends Cambridge University.
- 1963** *Colmain* published.
- 1964** Lecturer in English, University of British Columbia, Canada.
- 1965** *Simple People* published.
- 1966** Lecturer at Queen Mary College, London.

- 1967** *Wise Child* produced in London. *The Caramel Crisis*, *Death of a Teddy Bear*, *Sleeping Dog*, *A Way With the Ladies* broadcast on BBC-TV; *Little Portia* published.
- 1968** *Sleeping Dog* and *Wise Child* published; *Spoiled* broadcast on BBC-TV.
- 1969** *Dutch Uncle* and *A Comeback for Stark* published; *The Dirt on Lucy Lane* and *Pig in a Poke* broadcast on BBC-TV.
- 1970** *The Idiot* produced in London; *Spoiled* produced in

- Glasgow. *Style of the Countess* and *The Princess* broadcast on BBC-TV.
- 1971** *Butley* produced in Oxford and London, and published. *Spoiled* produced in London and published. *The Man in the Side-Car* broadcast on BBC.
- 1972** *Butley* produced in New York ("Best Play 1972-73" Theatre Yearbook) — Alan Bates wins Tony and Drama Desk Awards for Best Actor for his portrayal of the title character; Tony nominations also go to Hayward Morse (Best Supporting

Actor) and *Butley* (Best Play). *Butley* published in the U.S. *The Idiot* is published. Gray receives the Evening Standard Award.

1975 *Otherwise Engaged* produced in London; *Plaintiffs and Defendants* and *Two Sundays* broadcast on BBC-TV. *Butley* is adapted for film.

1976 *Dog Days* produced in Oxford. *Otherwise Engaged* enters multiple publishings. Gray receives another Evening Standard Award.

1977 *Otherwise Engaged* receives its New York premiere ("Best Play 1976-77" Theatre Yearbook). *Dog Days* is published.

1978 *Molly* is produced in London; *The Rear Column* produced in New York and London. *The Rear Column* is published.

1979 *Close of Play* and *Stagestruck* produced in London.

1981 *Close of Play* premieres in New York. *Quartermaine's Terms* premieres in London and is published. *Happiness of States* and *Stagestruck* are published.

1982 *Stagestruck* and Gray's version of *Tartuffe* premiere in New York.

1983 *Quartermaine's Terms* ("Best Play 1982-83" Theatre Yearbook) premieres in New York.

1984 *The Common Pursuit* is produced in England and the U.S.; Gray resigns his lectureship at Queen Mary College.

1987 *Melon* produced in London. Gray's screenplays *A Month in the Country* and *After Pilkington* are produced. *Quartermaine's Terms* is adapted and broadcast on BBC-TV.

1990 *Hidden Laughter* produced in London; *The Common Pursuit* and *Melon* are adapted for televi-

sion; *Old Flames* and *Never Slept* are written for television.

1995 *Cell Mates* produced in London.

1996 *Simply Disconnected* (a sequel to 1977's *Otherwise Engaged*) produced in London.

1997 *Life Support* produced and published in London, reuniting the creative team from *Butley*: Alan Bates, Harold Pinter (directing), and Simon Gray. The novel *Breaking Hearts* published.

1998 *Just the Three of Us* produced and published.

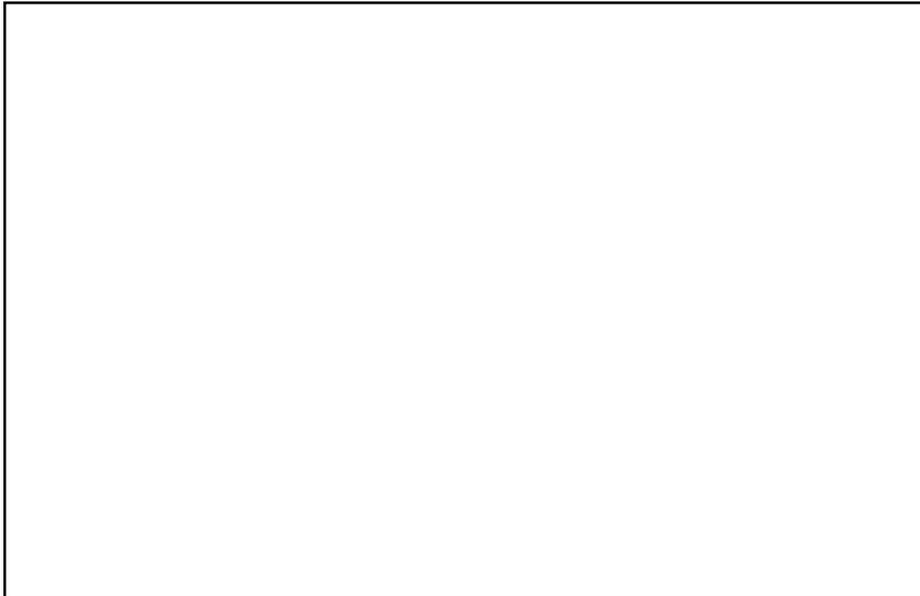
1999 *The Late Middle Classes* produced and published.

2001 *Japes* produced and published, the novel *Enter A Fox* published.

2004 *Butley* produced by the Huntington Theatre Company, starring Nathan Lane.



The original production of *A Common Pursuit*, 1984 (L to R) Robert East, Ian Ogilvy, and Nicholas LePrevost



BACKGROUND & Objectives

Ben Butley's world is a microcosm of University life. His office is both a haven and holding cell in the back-stabbing, competitive and student crammed halls of academia. He is a study in contrasts — both brilliant and acerbic while desperate and despairing. Like Diggory Diggory Delvet, he keeps burrowing into holes of his making. He starts the day with a shaving cut, and just when he thinks it can't get any worse, it does. A fascinating study of an alienated man, *Butley* explores the boomerang effects of a man's indiscriminate destructiveness with surprisingly entertaining results.

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

1. Identify central themes in *Butley*, including:
 - the self-destructive personality
 - the depiction of the anti-hero
 - the 'unities' of time and place
2. Relate themes and issues of *Butley* to their own lives.
3. Analyze the play's themes and issues within the character's generational, gender, social and class context.
4. Examine the presentation of sexually ambiguous characters in the play.
5. Learn to recognize, find and examine and appreciate literary references made in the play.
6. Participate in hands-on activities to enhance understanding of the play.
7. Evaluate the Huntington Theatre production of *Butley*.



BU Theatre by T. Charles Erickson

Audience Etiquette

Because many students have not had the opportunity to view live theatre, we are including an audience etiquette section with each literary/curriculum guide. Teachers, please spend time on this subject since it will greatly enhance your students' experience at the theatre.

1. How does one respond to a live performance of a play, as opposed to when seeing a film at a local cinema? What is the best way to approach viewing a live performance of a play? What things should you look and listen for?
2. What is the audience's role during a live performance? How do you think audience behavior can affect an actor's performance?
3. What do you know about the theatrical rehearsal process? Have you ever participated in one as an actor, singer, director, or technical person?
4. How do costumes, set, lights, sound and props enhance a theatre production?

THEMES AND Related Works

THEMES

- Butley as “anti-hero”
- self-destructive relationships
- social vs sexual identity
- literary awareness and appreciation

RELATED WORKS IN FICTIONAL ACADEMIC SETTINGS

Drama

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf
by Edward Albee (1966)



Elizabeth Taylor in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*

The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie
by Muriel Spark (1969)

Master Class
by Terrance McNally (1995)

Arcadia
by Tom Stoppard (1993)

The Lesson
by Eugene Ionesco (1951)

Oleanna
by David Mamet (1993)

Fiction

Thinks (2001)

Small World (1985)

Changing Places (1979)
by David Lodge



Nicole Kidman & Anthony Hopkins in *The Human Stain*

The Human Stain
by Philip Roth (2001)

Lucky Jim
by Kingsley Amis (1954)

Moo
by Jane Smiley (1996)

Straight Man
by Richard Russo (1998)

White Noise
by Don DeLillo (1989)

Reunion
by Alan Lightman (2003)



Gwyneth Paltrow & Aaron Eckart in *Possession*

Possession
by A.S. Byatt (1991)

Rookery Blues (1995)
The Dean's List (1998)
by Jon Hassler

Wonder Boys
by Michael Chabon (1996)

Film

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf
directed by Mike Nichols (1966)

The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie
directed by Ronald Neame (1969)



Maggie Smith in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*

Oleanna
directed by David Mamet (1994)

The Human Stain
directed by Robert Benton
(2003)

Lucky Jim
directed by John and Ray Boulting (1957)

Possession
directed by Neil LaBute (2002)

Wonder Boys
directed by Curtis Hanson (2000)

Butley
directed by Harold Pinter (1975)



Alan Bates & Harold Pinter on set in *Butley*



PREPARATION FOR *Butley*

Read “Gray’s Academy” and “Gray’s Chronology” (pages 4 & 8). Have students research, in groups, the academic life and publications of Simon Gray and then present their findings. Suggested categories for research include, but are not limited to:

- His life as an academic
- His feelings about teaching
- His development as a playwright
- The influence of Britain’s so-called “Angry Young Men”
- His artistic partnership with Alan Bates and Harold Pinter
- His theatrical success, which yielded two “Best Plays’ awards
- His other literary accomplishments: television adaptations, play adaptations and the publication of two novels

The “Anti-Hero”

Literary Terms — A Dictionary, defines the “anti-hero” as follows: “A type of hero lacking the traditional heroic qualities (such a courage, idealism and fortitude), frequently a pathetic, comic or even anti-social figure. Simon Gray began writing after a flurry of British authors in the fifties,

who, focusing on thematic issues of bitterness and social disillusionment were termed, “Angry Young Men” and wrote about, well, “angry, young men.” Who are some of these playwrights and authors whose work is associated with characters identified as “Angry Young Men.”

Simon Gray’s work often follows those “Angry Young Men’ to create the anti-hero as protagonist. Although witty, intelligent and verbally fast on his feet, Ben Butley is an aggressive predator on the make to take everyone down with him. Interestingly, however, he is not necessarily completely unlikeable.

Many interesting articles on the anti-hero motif in modern literature, drama and fiction can be found at www.imdb.com (the internet movie data base). Two such articles are:

- *The Rise of the Anti-Hero* — http://www.inq7.net/lif/2003/jun/14/lif_4-1.htm
- *Exploring the Dark Side: The Anti-Hero’s Journey* by James Bonnet — http://www.writersstore.com/article.php?articles_id=40

Explore these articles (or others you may find) to compare and contrast

the characteristics of the classic hero to the anti-hero in literary and dramatic fiction.

KEY ISSUES

The ‘Unities’

The Greek philosopher Aristotle, in response to the criticisms of Plato and Socrates wrote an invaluable resource guide to Greek drama called *The Poetics*. In this tract, he outlined the principles and theories governing successful plays, i.e., tragedies. (He primarily based his findings on the work of Sophocles.) The necessary three unities of the drama — action, place and time — are often attributed to him. Why are these unities perceived to be instrumental to the ‘well-made’ play? Can you think of any plays that occur over the course of one day? Can you think of any plays that take place in one setting? How do these plays benefit from respecting ‘the unities?’

Sexual Ambiguity

Ben Butley is a married man, or a soon to be divorced man to be more precise. He seems quite possessive and jealous of Joey, his male office mate and room mate, yet he doesn’t actually say that they are or were ever lovers. What is Butley’s sexual orientation? How important is it to the characters and the plot and one’s understanding of the play? Harold Pinter, the director of the film version, said of Butley, “Butley was a man living in a kind of no man’s land — between women and between men. I understood from the play that his sexual experience was with women but that he probably liked men better. In other words, I didn’t see him as a homosexual... [but as] mentally attracted to men.” Do you agree with Pinter’s assessment?

Literary Choices

In order to understand Butley, it is necessary to know what poems and authors are important to him and why. Curiously enough, Butley is a big fan of Beatrix Potter's nursery rhymes. He makes reference to several characters including Diggory Diggory Delvet, Cecily Parsley, Appley Dapple and Ninny Ninny Netticoat. Butley even tells Reg that he calls Joey, "Appley Dapple." Inquiring minds should begin with what Potter has to say through this character.

Appley Dapple

*Appley Dapple, a little
brown mouse
Gone to the cupboard
in somebody's house.*

*In somebody's cupboard
There's everything nice,
Cake, cheese, jam, biscuits
— All charming for mice!*

*Appley Dapple has little
sharp eyes
And Appley Dapple is so
fond of pies!*

Is this poem an apt description for Joey? Why or why not? In Potter's illustration, Appley steals the pies! How is that a comment on Butley's view of Joey? When Joey storms out of the office, Butley takes a swig of Scotch and recites:

*Appley Dapple, little
brown mouse
Goes to the cupboard in
somebody's house
In somebody's cupboard there's
everything nice
Pot, scotch, french letters
For middle-aged mice*

What do the changed lyrics signify? Is he still referring to Joey or himself?



DID YOU Know....?

- One night, after making a guest appearance on Broadway in *The Play What I Wrote*, Nathan Lane went out to dinner with British actors Kenneth Branagh and Benedick Bates. Branagh suggested that Lane should play the lead role in the play *Butley* one day. Lane turned to Benedick and suggested that he play Joey, Butley's roommate. And here they are!
- Benedick Bates is the son of the original *Butley*, Alan Bates. And, yes, he was named after the character of Benedick in Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing!*
- Nathan Lane adopted an English accent for his character Vincent Crummies in the 2002 film adaptation of *Nicholas Nickleby*.
- The first film that renowned English actor and playwright, Harold Pinter, directed was... Simon Gray's screen adaptation of *Butley!*
- Cate Blanchett is slated to play the role of Beatrix Potter in an upcoming film. (Potter was a devoted naturalist and her specialty was mycology — the study of fungus.)

Photos, from top: Kenneth Branagh; Benedick and Alan Bates, photo by Bruce Glikas for Broadway.com; Nathan Lane as Vincent Crummies in the 2002 film *Nicholas Nickleby*; Harold Pinter; Cate Blanchette

For Further Exploration

1. As a gifted literary professor, Butley tosses off the names of several prominent authors and poets, many of them British. Can you play the literary name game? Investigate the following authors, their time periods and some of their works:

T.S. Elliot – *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*

John Milton – *Paradise Lost*

William Shakespeare – *The Winter's Tale*
(not, as Butley says, "A Winter's Tale")

Edmund Spenser – *The Faerie Queene*

Goethe – *Faust*

D. H. Lawrence – *Women in Love*

William Burroughs – *Naked Lunch*

Jean Genet – *The Maids*

Philip Roth – *Portnoy's Complaint*

Robert Herrick – *To Daffodils*

George Byron – *She Walks in Beauty*

William Blake – *The Tiger*

2. Harold Pinter made the film version of *Butley* in 1975. In *Film Archive*, Pinter said of visiting playwright Simon Gray, "After each take the first person I looked at, was, on the whole, not the cameraman or the operator or the continuity girl or the sound mixer, but Simon Gray. The shot can be perfect, the sound perfect, but if what we're looking at and listening to is not fully and precisely expressed, you're nowhere. The author's judgment and instinct in relation to this central fact must be invaluable. After all, he wrote the damn thing." What is the benefit of having the playwright in the rehearsal process or on the set? Are there any downsides?
3. Butley's interest in Beatrix Potter seems to be a fascinating non sequitur for a man fond of quoting literary giants such as Shakespeare and T.S. Eliot. Helen Beatrix Potter was an accomplished scientist who specialized in the fields of

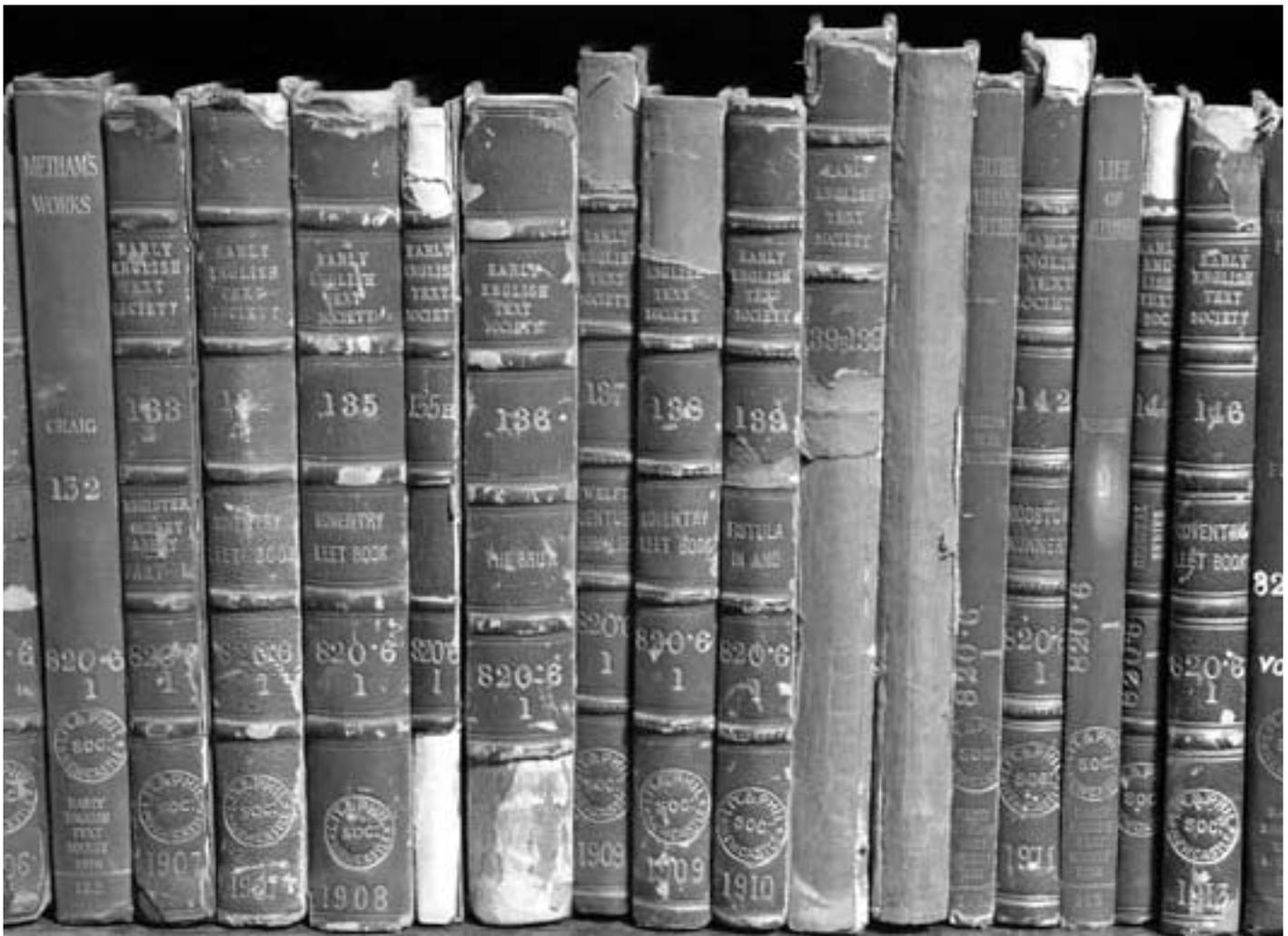


Reading Mouse by Beatrix Potter

mycology (the study of fungus) as well as entomology, botany, geology and other naturalist fields. As a woman, however, she was not allowed to practice despite her outstanding contributions. (She discovered that lichens were really two organisms that lived together, for example.) So, she turned her great interest in animals and plants into stories, which she wrote and illustrated and published, to the delight of the world.

Why would a man like Ben Butley be interested in nursery rhymes? It might help to look beneath the surface of their simplicity. Eli Siegel writes in *Romanticism Is Still With Us*, "Reality is not denied, spurned, lessened or rejected by Romanticism. All romanticists have tended to make reality and wonder akin, the fact and strangeness like each other; all art is some way has gone after this."

Is it possible that the realist that Butley is is a cover for a Romantic sensibility that has gone unfulfilled, whether due to his sexual complexity, his disdain for academic boredom or his own unpublished work? Is Butley's lashing out at those he loves a deflection from vulnerability and pain? What do you think makes Butley the quintessential anti-hero that he is? In Beatrix Potter's world, whimsy and fact live side by side — animals toil, make friends, fear strangers — all in an orderly manner. Perhaps Butley seeks a stability that he never himself found in Potter's natural world?



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MASTERY ASSESSMENT

Instruct students to read the stanza(s) from each song and answer the following questions.

ACT ONE

1. How do the initial stage directions regarding the state of Butley and Joey's desks provide key information about these characters (and possibly their relationship?)
2. Why is there a poster of T.S. Elliot on the wall?
3. In Ben's opening dialogue with James, we see that Butley is lying.
4. The opening exchange between Butley and Joey provides key exposition. What characters are mentioned and what are Butley and Joey's relationships to them?
5. What is the significance of 'the board' for Joey?
6. Why is Butley slipping into what appears to be a cockney accent?
7. Why does Butley insist upon calling Reg, 'Ted'?
8. Butley grills Joey with the explanation, " My natural force plays excitingly with your natural submission." What do you think is the nature of their relationship?
9. Butley ask Joey to consider the 'subtext' of his place at the University. Butley's subtext is not very subtle, however. What is he really implying when he rips into 'Ted's' cooking habits?
10. The stage directions tell us that Joey carefully mentions that Tom, Butley's boring friend is,

“very fond of Anne, isn’t he?” Does Butley hear Joey’s subtext?

11. Why does Butley report to Joey very unflattering comments that Anne allegedly made about him? Do you agree with Butley that it was “Anne’s way of getting at” Butley? Or is it another way for Butley to “get at” Joey?
12. When Butley starts to attack Reg’s father, he asks if he has ‘plaster gnomes’ in his garden. In the movie, *The Full Monty*, plaster gnomes litter the garden of the antagonist and provide several comic moments in the film. What do these figurines seem to signify to some Brits?
13. According to Butley, a football (soccer) match in the South is “slightly below music and still above theatre, in the cultural scale.” What is he insinuating?
14. Butley refers to his mother-in-law as a “mad monk,” his wife as more “man” than he and the baby Marina as the “odd man out.” Is Butley really a misogynist? Or are his jokes a cover for his real feelings?
15. Butley often hums the hymn, “Christ the Lord is risen today” as

a wicked “marriage joke.” Can you guess at what he means to parody?

16. Anne astonishes Butley when she announces that Tom has asked her to marry him. She amends, “he’s the dullest man she ‘ever spent an evening with’ to “he’s the dullest man she ‘ever spent the night with?’” What’s the difference?

ACT TWO

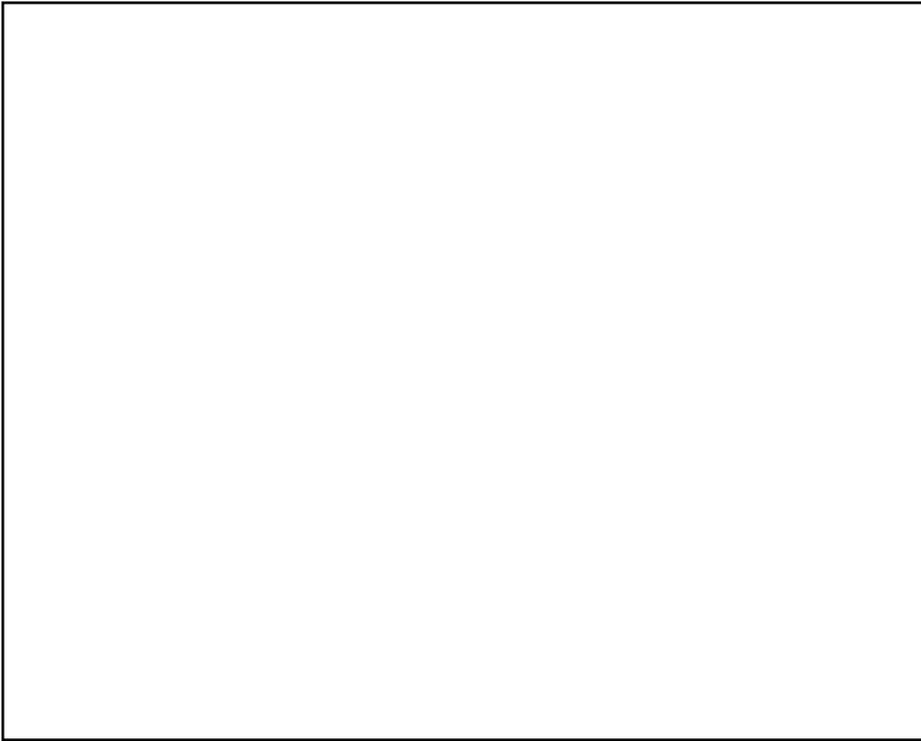
1. Why does Butley call Tom Weatherley’s school? What do you think he hopes to accomplish?
2. Butley accuses Joey of “building up a case here for a conspiracy theory of personal relationships.” Can you diagram the web of relationships that no longer include Butley?
3. Joey wants to go back to the library when Butley asks who he is “hiding from.” Joey shrugs. Butley guesses it is Edna, but the stage directions suggest that it is someone else. Who?
4. Butley seems to be foreshadowing an awareness of his own circumstances when he volunteers, “Perhaps I had a sense of vacan-

cies opening up in my life.’ How aware do you think he is of the alienating effect he has on his relationships?

5. Reg appears at the office and drops several bombshells in Butley’s lap. What are three of them?
6. Butley gets back at Reg by telling him that he avoided the National Service because he “got took queer.” How does Butley try to expose or insult Reg in this devious exchange? And why do we accept — as Reg does — that Butley might have been perceived as gay?
7. What is the irony of Butley trying to give Reg his “kidneys?”
8. Why did Joey lie to Butley about Reg’s family background? What did he set up Butley to do? Do you think this ‘fiction’ was warranted?
9. How does Edna exact her revenge on Butley?
10. What’s the significance of the last Beatrix Potter nursery rhyme? How does it symbolize Butley’s assessment of Gardner and his relationship to him?



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QUESTIONS FOR AFTER Attending the Performance

Note to teachers: After viewing the show, ask the following questions:

1. About the Production

- A. What was your overall reaction? Were you moved? Surprised? Entertained? Explain your reactions. How was the musical review structured? Did it build to a single climax? Was it episodic? Did this structure help or hinder your understanding of the piece? Was the dialogue interesting? Appropriate? Were you aware of the imagery and symbolism during the course of the piece? Would you have been aware of these devices without previous preparation?

- B. Was the pace and tempo of the production effective and appropriate?

2. About the Characters

- A. Did the characters touch you personally in some ways? Did you care about them?
- B. Were the characters three-dimensional and believable?
- C. Were the motivations of the characters clear?
- D. What qualities were revealed by the actions and speech of the characters?
- E. Did the characters change/develop/undergo transformation during the course of the piece?

- F. In what ways did the characters reveal the themes of the piece?

3. About the Set

- A. Was the set usable and workable?
- B. Was the set compatible with the production as a whole? Were there any features of the set that distracted from the action of the piece?
- C. Did the design reflect the themes, type and style of piece?
- D. Were the artistic qualities of unity, balance, line, texture, mass and color used effectively?
- E. Did the set provide appropriate environment and atmosphere?
- F. Was the set used to present any symbolic images or did it simply represent the space in which the action of the play occurred? Did it contain elements of both a "realistic" and a "symbolic" approach?

4. About Lighting and Sound

- A. Did the lighting establish mood and atmosphere? Was the illumination sufficient? Did the lighting harmonize with, and contribute toward, the unity of the production?
- B. Were the music and sound effects appropriately conceived? Were they executed effectively?

5. About Costumes/Makeup/ Hairstyles

- A. Were all of these elements correct in terms of the period fashion? Were they suitable in terms of character and storytelling for the production?
- B. Did the costumes and make-up use of color/ design serve to illuminate the themes, type and style of the piece, or any particular choices of interpretations in this production?

OPEN RESPONSE & Writing

Open Response Assessment

Instructions for students: Please answer the following as thoroughly as possible in one well planned and carefully written paragraph. Remember to use topic sentences and examples from the text.

1. How is Butley the personification of the anti-hero?
2. Why does Butley insist upon meddling in other's affairs? Do you think his path of self-destruction is inevitable?
3. The life of the University professor is not an easy one. What examples from *Butley* would be most challenging, do you think?
4. Read William Blake's poem, *The Tiger and The Lamb*. Why does Butley quote from those poems while referring to Reg?
5. Do you find Butley either sympathetic or unsympathetic as a character? Can you find examples from the text that support both points of view at the same time?
6. Although Joey and Anne ultimately leave their self-destructive relationships with Butley, both characters admit to not

loving their new partners. Do you think they are making wise choices?

7. Butley is left, at the end of the play, literally 'in the dark.' Has he learned anything from his monumental day or will he remain — to use one of his favorite words — metaphorically — in the dark as well?

Writing Assignments

1. Does Joey love Butley? Compose a journal entry from Joey's diary that suggests that he does and another that proves that he doesn't. Use dialogue from the play to support your views.
2. Read a plot summary of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*. (Read the whole play, if you have time!) In it, Leontes, the King of Sicilia, makes grave mistakes which he atones for over the course of sixteen years. Eventually, he finds "redemption" with his wife and daughter. Is there any chance of redemption for Butley, or is resigned to the "hate" in Miss Heasman's essay title?
3. Butley's mention of madeleines is a direct reference from a

famous passage in Marcel Proust's *In Remembrances of Things Past*. Upon eating the little cake, Proust reflects, "When could it have come to me, this all-powerful joy? I sensed that it was connected with the taste of the tea and the cake, but that it infinitely transcended those savors... Write a description of fantastically memorable eating experience that you remember from childhood.

4. When Joey announces to Butley that he's sorry not to have waited to announce that he's leaving him, Butley responds, "Which shows you have no sense of classical form. We're preserving the unities. The use of messengers has been quite skillful." Discuss what the unities are, in Aristotelian terms, and how Simon Gray preserves them in *Butley*.
5. Butley parodies the phrase "imitation is the sincerest form of flattery" with his admonition to Joey that, "toadying is the sincerest form of contempt." Can you list five well-known phrases and find a way to 'spin' them?

MEDIA Assessment

These questions and hands-on exercises are interactive challenges in Drama, Music, Dance, Visual Arts and Design that inspire further consideration or understanding of the play.

Creating Characterization

Have each of your students choose a character from *Butley* to portray. As though they were preparing for the role in rehearsal, have them answer the following questions about their characters:

- a. What do I want in the play? What is my overall objective?
- b. What stands in the way of what I want? What or who are my obstacles in the way of achieving my objective? Does what I want change throughout the course of the play? How?
- c. Does my character change during the course of the play? What is my character's journey or plot transformation?
- d. What are the contradictions inherent in my character?

Role Playing/Improvisation

- a. Have students improvise an important moment from the play, *Butley*. Students should test the effects of changing something about the performance, tone of voice, character trait, or a vital remark. How does such a change affect the selected moment? How does the pacing or posturing of an actor affect the comic timing of the piece? Is it possible that a change in the tone of voice can turn a humorous moment into a serious one?

- b. Have students improvise a scene after the conclusion of the play. What happens to Butley, Joey and Anne Butley? This exercise will help students understand that creating a work always involves an interrupted process or a decision to stop what could be endlessly revised. Look to see if students have been able to identify some of Simon Gray's main points.
- c. Divide the students into three groups and assign each group to represent one act in the play. Students should create a tableaux or stage picture that represents the characters during that act of the play. Students should take turns looking at the each other's tableaux and be able to identify which part of the play it represents.

Acting

Have students act out a scene from *Butley*. They should use props and elements of costumes, if possible. Have them consider their placement on the stage, blocking (who moves where and when), gestures, vocal tone, music, and the intended emotional impact of the scene.

Visual Art

Have students choose a character from the play. Create a collage out of paper, drawings, magazine and newspaper clippings that represent the character in her actions, relationships, attitudes, personality, etc. Include quotations from the play that reveal something about the character. These can be quotations from the character

as well as quotations about the character. Encourage students to consider texture and color when making decisions about how best to represent the character. Have students share their work with the class. By picking out the qualities of each collage, have them guess which character in the play each collage represents.

Music/Dance

Have students bring in tapes or CDs of music that they feel represents a central theme in the play *Butley*. Ask them to play an excerpt for the class and explain what mood the music creates, why they chose this particular piece, and how it relates to the play. The class should then select the piece of music that they feel best represents the play and create an interpretive dance for the class to perform. The dance along with the music should represent a key idea in the play. Allow time for students to talk about the process they used in creating, rehearsing, and performing their dance.

The Design Process

Students should research clothing styles from 1970s London. After reading a scene in which Butley and Joey appear together, students should design their apparel appropriate for this scene. The designs should reflect what we know about the characters' personalities, social and economic standings, personal histories and convictions. Students should be able to defend their design choices and explain how each man's clothing is a reflection of his character.



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LESSON PLANS

Teachers' note: Choose activities that are appropriate for your classroom period.

ONE-DAY LESSON PLAN introduces students to the plot, character, author, and themes of the play. Requires one class period before viewing the play.

DAY ONE – Introducing the Production

1. Distribute **Master Assessment** questions (page 15) for *Butley* for students to read before and to review after attending the performance.

Optional: Distribute Vocabulary Handout and ask students to define each word. A vocabulary test could be administered after viewing the play.

2. Read the synopsis of *Butley* in the literary guide (page 3). Discuss other works the students have studied that have similar themes and issues.
3. Copy and distribute the information about the playwright, Simon Gray (pages 4 & 8). In groups or individually, have students underline the highlights in the playwright's life and report to the class.

Optional: To save time, narrate highlights to students.

4. If time allows, highlight key points or distribute copies of **Notes on the Original Productions** (page 6) and discuss the production history of the play.

FOUR-DAY LESSON PLAN introduces students to the play and then, after viewing the performance, asks them to think more critically about it. Includes time for class discussion and individual assessment.

DAY ONE – Introducing the Production

Same as Day One above; completed before seeing the play.

DAY TWO – The Production

Attend the performance at the Huntington Theatre Company.

Homework: Students should answer the **Mastery Assessment** questions.

DAY THREE – Follow-up Discussion

Discuss **Mastery Assessment** answers in class.

DAY FOUR – Test

Individual Assessment: Choose either several questions from the **Open Response Assessment** or one question from **Writing Assignments** (Page 18) for students to answer in one class period

*Optional: Students may choose one of the **For Further Exploration** or **Media Assessment** tasks to complete for extra credit.*

SEVEN-DAY LESSON PLAN completely integrates *Butley* into your schedule. Within seven school days, you can introduce the play, assign reading and vocabulary, and assess your students on both a group and individual level. Student will ideally view the play after completing all assigned work.

DAY ONE – Introducing the Play

Same as Day One above

*Optional: Distribute **Vocabulary Handout** due on Day Four.*

Homework: Read Act One of *Butley* and answer the corresponding **Mastery Assessment** questions.

DAY TWO – Act One

Discuss Act One and answers to questions.

Homework: Read Act Two of *Butley* and answer corresponding **Mastery Assessment** questions.

DAY THREE – Act Two

Discuss Act Two and answers to questions; assign parts to students and read/act out scenes.

Homework: Read Handout – Literary Detective Work and assign lines of poetry to students to research and questions to answer.

DAY FOUR – Act Three

Discuss Handout #2 - Literary Detective Work and have students share their poetry discoveries.

Optional: Review definitions of vocabulary words.

Homework: Prepare work from **Preparation, Key Issues, For Further Exploration** or **Media Assessment** sections.

DAY FIVE – Group Work

Meet in groups to prepare presentations; schedule library for this period if necessary.

DAY SIX – Presentations

Group Assessment: Students present their work to the class.

Homework: Compile sample questions from **Open Response** or **Writing Assignments** (page 18) in preparation for the test.

DAY SEVEN – Test

Individual Assessment: Choose either several questions from the **Open Response Assessment** or one question from **Writing Assignments** for students to answer in a one class period.

Optional: Administer vocabulary portion on the test.

*Optional: Students may choose to complete one of the **For Further Exploration** or **Media Assessment** tasks for extra credit.*

Name: _____

Date: _____

HANDOUT 1
BUTLEY
VOCABULARY

detrius	cotton wool	*mac	*bugger
time-table	*chappie	fortnight	gastric
infantile	genteelly	adroit	dialectical
rhetorical	tutorial	subtext	menage
Gurkha	furtive	protégé	coterie
<i>triste</i>	<i>au naturel</i>	canteen	<i>rognons au vin</i>
<i>folie de grandeur</i>	loutish	hooligan	harangue
indecipherable	bonny	piffing	importunities
*settles the hash	didactic	enigmatic	stoic
exuberance	prospectus	tenacious	antagonize
welching	insolent	egalitarian	preposterous
lout	*bolshy	ilk	toady
*porter	*sod	*Arsenal	*towers
*National Service	*cheers	El Alamein	*N.C.O.
vogue	dilletante	*blokes	*chars
genteel	*First	*sixth form	*knickers

*British slang words

Name: _____

Date: _____

HANDOUT 2

LITERARY DETECTIVE WORK IN BUTLEY

As an English Professor, Ben Butley makes dozens of literary references. In order to understand how these odd bits of poetry are woven into the fabric of the play, especially if the reference isn't particularly clear, one has to play literary detective.

Reading Assignment

In the following scene, (script pages 33-34) Butley begins to read a student's paper on *The Winter's Tale*. He suddenly looks up and asks, "Why the hell did we call her Marina?" At first, the question regarding his baby daughter seems to come out of the blue — a random thought. But consider the context more closely.

What is Butley doing before he asks that question? He is half-heartedly reading a student paper on a *The Winter's Tale*. Among those last group of plays categorized as "Romances" is a sister piece to *The Winter's Tale* called *Pericles*. The heroine is a young woman named Marina, who rehabilitates her long lost father, Pericles. A professor of literature would be well aware of the name. And then... a snatch of a poem follows.

*I made this, I have forgotten
And remember.
The rigging weak and the canvas rotten.
Between one June and another September.*

Butley explains that the baby was conceived in September. Other lines of poetry follow:

*Beneath the trees there is no ease
For the dull brain, the sharp desires
And the quick eyes of Woolly Bear.*

He continues in prose.

*It must have been our last, we were already
fallen into the sere, the yellow leaf,
a flash of thigh in the yellow leaf,
What seas what shores what granite
islands towards my...*

And finishes in verse.

*...timbers
And woodthrush calling through the fog
My daughter.*

Helpful questions

1. Where are those lines of poetry from? If a line looks familiar to you, check out the source. If you don't know, a good place to get information is from <http://metacrawler.com/>. Just type in a phrase or line and you will be linked to related sites. Be sure to enter different combinations of phrases or lines if you don't get immediate results.
2. Has there been any textual or visual references to Butley's favorite authors? Clues to the poetry's identity may have been provided from other sources. (Hint. think about the poster on his wall.)
3. Congratulations — you've discovered the first source of the poetry. How does the title of the poem answer Butley's original question about the baby's name?
4. Do you think the verse is all from one source? What are the clues that a few different passages are being quoted here? When does the rhyme scheme change? Can you locate a new source of those lines of verse?
5. The lines of prose seem to be oddly juxtaposed here. Is it possible Butley isn't remembering them properly? Why not? What is he thinking about? ("Fallen into the yellow sear" is a big clue.)
6. The poem ends in verse. Which poem is that from? The poem ends on the simple line, "My daughter." What do you think Butley is thinking about Marina at this moment?
7. Go back and read the source poetry all the way through. Do some more detective work to analyze the content and context of the poems. Do they belong in a larger collection of verse? What do you know about the author who wrote them?
8. How do those poems help you to understand more about Butley? Why are those poems significant to him?

