

高等院校英语专业系列教材 · 英文影印版

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Access Literature

An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, and Drama



文学基础教程

戏剧部分

[美] 芭芭拉·巴纳德 [美] 戴维·F·温 著

 中国人民大学出版社

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[美]芭芭拉·巴纳德(Barbara Barnard) 著
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PROFILE OF A PLAYWRIGHT— DAVID IVES (b. 1950)

Three monkeys sitting at typewriters

trying to write *Hamlet*; people speaking in a new “universal language” in which a word processor is a “verbo blender,” “velcro” means welcome, and when you’re “spinichless,” you’re speechless; and characters waking up to find themselves located in states of mind rather than geographical locations—these are some of the zany, and usually hilarious, scenarios David Ives’s characters find themselves.

David Ives was born in Chicago and received his education at Northwestern University and the Yale Drama School. He writes for television, film and opera as well as for the stage, and many of his plays have enjoyed on- and off-Broadway productions in New York City. His one-act play *Sure Thing*, which appears below, was first produced in 1988 as part of the annual comedy festival of the Manhattan Punch Line Theatre. It was also performed as part of a production of several plays from Ives’s book *All in the Timing* at Primary Stages in New York City in 1993.

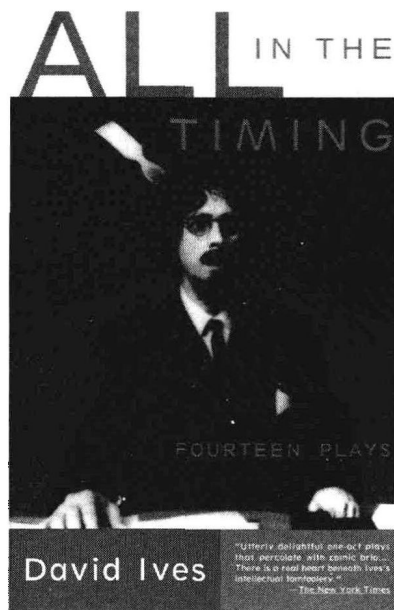
That production was so successful, that it subsequently moved to the John Houseman theatre in New York City. *The Philadelphia*, also below, was part of the same production of six one-act comedies from *All in the Timing*. Before opening at Primary Stages and then the John Houseman theatre, it had premiered at the 1992 New Hope Performing Arts Festival in New Hope, Pennsylvania.

Frolics in Ivesland

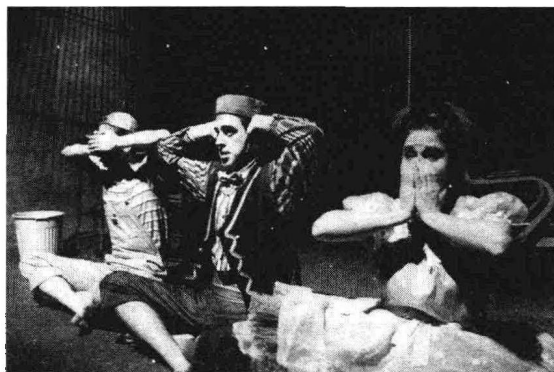
In Stephanie Coen's interview with David Ives (reprinted in this chapter's "Talking Lit"), she points out to him that one critic, in discussing his work, used words like "Ivesian" and "Ivesland" and that in his plays, "the ordinary seems fantastical and the fantastical somehow seems ordinary." She also states that "[t]he short comedies . . . have sent critics to their thesauri for variations on the word *hilarious*." Indeed, Ives's work is hilarious; it's hard not to chuckle while reading his plays, and seeing them on the stage is pure delight.

What, then, accounts for the humorous effect of Ives's plays? He uses devices, like the ringing bell in *Sure Thing*, which are funny in themselves. He also makes good use of a standard device of comedy: juxtaposition (placing seemingly incongruous things side by side). He puts realistic and fantastical elements side by side in a way that makes us laugh. We have in *Words, Words, Words*, for instance, monkeys eating bananas and doing various monkey-like things, but they are also reciting lines from Milton's *Paradise Lost* and from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

Ives also uses anachronisms (details inconsistent with the time frame in which the action is taking place) for humorous effect. For example, in *Variations on the Death of Trotsky*, another of the one-act plays in *All in the Timing*, Trotsky's wife notices that the date on the spine of an encyclopedia volume is 1994; however, Leon Trotsky died on August 20, 1940, and the date on the calendar in the room where the scene takes place is August 21,



All in the Timing



Three monkeys Swift, Milton, and Kafka (Robert Stanton, Michael Countryman, and Nancy Opel), perform for the unseen Dr. Rosenbaum, who hopes to prove that three monkeys typing randomly will, eventually, produce *Hamlet*. Photo from the Primary Stages production in New York City.

1940, one day after the date of his death. (Leon Trotsky, an original founder of the Soviet Communist government, later came into disfavor with Joseph Stalin and lived in exile in Mexico City, until he was assassinated in 1940.) In another anachronistic moment, Trotsky says that ice picks will not be allowed in the house (he was killed with an ice pick), but ice cube trays will be allowed, "if they've been invented yet."

Plot and Form

Ives's departure from convention is not confined to his humor. Even the form and plot of David Ives's plays are innovative. *Sure Thing*, for example, does not for a moment follow the traditional arc of a plot (rising action, climax, falling action, resolution). You might argue that it has a resolution in the end, but the circular nature of the plot—repeating itself, folding back on itself, questioning itself—doesn't follow the traditional structure.

Also, the circularity of the structure here contributes to the existence of multiple possibilities for meaning. The playwright might have in mind a number of intentions as to what the play "means." Does the interaction between Betty and Bill represent the ups and downs of one relationship, the similarities among a number of relationships, the searching through various relationships before finding the right one, or just a funny spoof on the "dating game"? The answer is that it could represent any or all of these possible meanings, and that's part of what's interesting about Ives's innovative use of plot.



Betty and Bill (Played by actors Nancy Opel and Robert Stanton) try to get their romantic timing right, in the premiere production of *Sure Thing* at the Manhattan Punchline Theater (1993).

Characterization and Theme

In *Sure Thing*, we clearly do not have conventional characterization. Instead, these characters may actually be regarded as eponymous (representing all women and all men). The characterization is somewhat more conventional in *The Philadelphia*—certainly we get a better sense of the characters as individuals, although the terse,

funny dialogue through which they are revealed is hardly typical. In a sense, the cities mentioned as states of mind (Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Cleveland, Baltimore) are “characterized” in a humorous way by the properties jokingly attributed to them. Are there ways, though, in which this humorous theme (of states of mind which somehow resemble stereotypes about cities) also touches on common experiences that we have in everyday life? For instance, is going to the DMV (Department of Motor Vehicles) like “being in a Philadelphia,” as Ives’s play “defines” it?

Of course, in addition to these possible themes and ideas, the play is fun to read just because of the absurd situation. We have to chuckle when the waitress again and again offers the opposite of what she is asked to serve, and Al and Mark begin to ask for the opposite of what they actually want.



Mark (Danny Burstein) finds his day takes a turn for the better when his waitress (Kathy Morath) joins him for a cheese steak in the 1993 production of *The Philadelphia* at Primary Stages in New York City.

Setting and Staging

The stage sets for these two plays by Ives are quite simple and also similar. In both one-act plays, the characters are sitting in a simple interior setting, a table at a bar/restaurant or a café. In many plays, however, the instructions for setting and staging are much more elaborate and extensive. Some playwrights choose to use longer blocks of initial stage directions (which precede the body of the play), or to write more extensive parenthetical, italicized stage directions which appear in quotation marks within the dialogue. August Wilson, for example, in *Fences* (Chapter 26) uses rather lengthy initial stage directions in order to put the play in historical and cultural context. It is important to Wilson—given the fact that this play is part of a cycle of plays which represent various periods in African American history—to let the reader know how the events depicted in the play reflect that history and how they fit in with the whole progression of the black experience in American society.

Readings

David Ives (b. 1950)

Sure Thing (1988)

CHARACTERS:

BILL AND BETTY, both in their late twenties

SETTING: *A café table, with a couple of chairs*

Betty, reading at the table. An empty chair opposite her. Bill enters.

BILL: Excuse me. Is this chair taken?

BETTY: Excuse me?

BILL: Is this taken?

BETTY: Yes it is.

5 BILL: Oh. Sorry.

BETTY: Sure thing. (*A bell rings softly.*)

BILL: Excuse me. Is this chair taken?

BETTY: Excuse me?

BILL: Is this taken?

10 BETTY: No, but I'm expecting somebody in a minute.

BILL: Oh. Thanks anyway.

BETTY: Sure thing. (*A bell rings softly.*)

BILL: Excuse me. Is this chair taken?

BETTY: No, but I'm expecting somebody very shortly.

15 BILL: Would you mind if I sit here till he or she or it comes?

BETTY: (*glances at her watch*): They seem to be pretty late. . . .

BILL: You never know who you might be turning down.

BETTY: Sorry. Nice try, though.

BILL: Sure thing. (*Bell.*) Is this seat taken?

20 BETTY: No it's not.

BILL: Would you mind if I sit here?

BETTY: Yes I would.

BILL: Oh. (*Bell.*) Is this chair taken?

BETTY: No it's not.

BILL: Would you mind if I sit here? 25

BETTY: No. Go ahead.

BILL: Thanks. (*He sits. She continues reading.*)

Everyplace else seems to be taken.

BETTY: Mm-hm.

BILL: Great place.

BETTY: Mm-hm. 30

BILL: What's the book?

BETTY: I just wanted to read in quiet, if you don't mind.

BILL: No. Sure thing. (*Bell.*)

BILL: Everyplace else seems to be taken.

BETTY: Mm-hm. 35

BILL: Great place for reading.

BETTY: Yes, I like it.

BILL: What's the book?

BETTY: *The Sound and the Fury*.

BILL: Oh. Hemingway. (*Bell.*) What's the book? 40

BETTY: *The Sound and the Fury*.

BILL: Oh. Faulkner.

BETTY: Have you read it?

BILL: Not . . . actually. I've sure read *about* . . . it, though. It's supposed to be great.

BETTY: It is great. 45

BILL: I hear it's great. (*Small pause.*) Waiter?

(*Bell.*) What's the book?

BETTY: *The Sound and the Fury*.

BILL: Oh. Faulkner.

- BETTY: Have you read it?
- 50 BILL: I'm a Mets fan, myself. (*Bell.*)
- BETTY: Have you read it?
- BILL: Yeah, I read it in college.
- BETTY: Where was college?
- BILL: I went to Oral Roberts University. (*Bell.*)
- 55 BETTY: Where was college?
- BILL: I was lying. I never really went to college. I just like to party. (*Bell.*)
- BETTY: Where was college?
- BILL: Harvard.
- BETTY: Do you like Faulkner?
- 60 BILL: I love Faulkner. I spent a whole winter reading him once.
- BETTY: I've just started.
- BILL: I was so excited after ten pages that I went out and bought everything else he wrote. One of the greatest reading experiences of my life. I mean, all that incredible psychological understanding. Page after page of gorgeous prose. His profound grasp of the mystery of time and human existence. The smells of the earth . . . What do you think?
- BETTY: I think it's pretty boring. (*Bell.*)
- BILL: What's the book?
- 65 BETTY: *The Sound and the Fury*.
- BILL: Oh! Faulkner!
- BETTY: Do you like Faulkner?
- BILL: I love Faulkner.
- BETTY: He's incredible.
- 70 BILL: I spent a whole winter reading him once.
- BETTY: I was so excited after ten pages that I went out and bought everything else he wrote.
- BILL: All that incredible psychological understanding.
- BETTY: And the prose is so gorgeous.
- BILL: And the way he's grasped the mystery of time—
- 75 BETTY: —and human existence. I can't believe I've waited this long to read him.
- BILL: You never know. You might not have liked him before.
- BETTY: That's true.
- BILL: You might not have been ready for him. You have to hit these things at the right moment or it's no good.
- BETTY: That's happening to me.
- BILL: It's all in the timing. (*Small pause.*) My name's Bill, by the way. 80
- BETTY: I'm Betty.
- BILL: Hi.
- BETTY: Hi. (*Small pause.*)
- BILL: Yes I thought reading Faulkner was . . . a great experience.
- BETTY: Yes. (*Small pause.*) 85
- BILL: *The Sound and the Fury* . . . (*Another small pause.*)
- BETTY: Well. Onwards and upwards. (*She goes back to her book.*)
- BILL: Waiter—? (*Bell.*) You have to hit these things at the right moment or it's no good.
- BETTY: That's happened to me.
- BILL: It's all in the timing. My name's Bill, by the way. 90
- BETTY: I'm Betty.
- BILL: Hi.
- BETTY: Hi.
- BILL: Do you come in here a lot?
- BETTY: Actually I'm just in town for two days from Pakistan. 95
- BILL: Oh. Pakistan. (*Bell.*) My name's Bill, by the way.
- BETTY: I'm Betty.
- BILL: Hi.
- BETTY: Hi.
- BILL: Do you come here a lot? 100
- BETTY: Every once in a while. Do you?
- BILL: Not much anymore. Not as much as I used to. Before my nervous breakdown. (*Bell.*) Do you come in here a lot?
- BETTY: Why are you asking?
- BILL: Just interested.
- BETTY: Are you really interested, or do you just want to pick me up? 105
- BILL: No, I'm really interested.
- BETTY: Why would you be interested in whether I come in here a lot?

BILL: Just . . . getting acquainted.

BETTY: Maybe you're only interested for the sake of making small talk long enough to ask me back to your place to listen to some music, or because you've just rented some great tape for your VCR, or because you've got some terrific unknown Django Reinhardt record, only all you'll really want to do is fuck—which you won't do very well—after which you'll go into the bathroom and pee very loudly, then pad into the kitchen and get yourself a beer from the refrigerator without asking me whether I'd like anything, and then you'll proceed to lie back down beside me and confess that you've got a girlfriend named Stephanie who's away at medical school in Belgium for a year, and that you've been involved with her—*off and on*—in what you'll call a very "intricate" relationship, for about *seven YEARS*. None of which *interests* me, mister!

110 BILL: Okay. (*Bell.*) Do you come in here a lot?

BETTY: Every other day, I think.

BILL: I come in here quite a lot and I don't remember seeing you.

BETTY: I guess we must be on different schedules.

BILL: Missed connections.

115 BETTY: Yes. Different time zones.

BILL: Amazing how you can live right next door to somebody in this town and never even know it.

BETTY: I know.

BILL: City life.

BETTY: It's crazy.

120 BILL: We probably pass each other in the street every day. Right in front of this place, probably.

BETTY: Yep.

BILL (*looks around*): Well, the waiters here sure seem to be in some different time zone. I can't seem to locate one anywhere . . . Waiter! (*He looks back.*) So what do you— (*He sees that she's gone back to her book.*)

BETTY: I beg pardon?

BILL: Nothing. Sorry. (*Bell.*)

BETTY: I guess we must be on different schedules. 125

BILL: Missed connections.

BETTY: Yes. Different time zones.

BILL: Amazing how you can live right next door to somebody in this town and never even know it.

BETTY: I know.

BILL: City life. 130

BETTY: It's crazy.

BILL: You weren't waiting for somebody when I came in, were you?

BETTY: Actually, I was.

BILL: Oh. Boyfriend?

BETTY: Sort of. 135

BILL: What's a sort-of boyfriend?

BETTY: My husband.

BILL: Ah-ha. (*Bell.*) You weren't waiting for somebody when I came in, were you?

BETTY: Actually I was.

BILL: Oh. Boyfriend? 140

BETTY: Sort of.

BILL: What's a sort-of boyfriend?

BETTY: We were meeting here to break up.

BILL: Mm-hm . . . (*Bell.*) What's a sort-of boyfriend?

BETTY: My lover. Here she comes right now! 145
(*Bell.*)

BILL: You weren't waiting for somebody when I came in, were you?

BETTY: No, just reading.

BILL: Sort of a sad occupation for a Friday night, isn't it? Reading here, all by yourself?

BETTY: Do you think so?

BILL: Well sure. I mean, what's a good-looking woman like you doing out alone on a Friday night? 150

BETTY: Trying to keep away from lines like that.

BILL: No, listen— (*Bell.*) You weren't waiting for somebody when I came in, were you?

BETTY: No, just reading.

- BILL: Sort of a sad occupation for a Friday night, isn't it? Reading here all by yourself?
- 155 BETTY: I guess it is, in a way.
- BILL: What's a good-looking woman like you doing out alone on a Friday night anyway? No offense, but . . .
- BETTY: I'm out alone on a Friday night for the first time in a very long time.
- BILL: Oh.
- BETTY: You see, I just recently ended a relationship.
- 160 BILL: Oh.
- BETTY: Of rather long standing.
- BILL: I'm sorry. (*Small pause.*) Well listen, since reading by yourself is such a sad occupation for a Friday night, would you like to go elsewhere?
- BETTY: No . . .
- BILL: Do something else?
- 165 BETTY: No thanks.
- BILL: I was headed out to the movies in a while anyway.
- BETTY: I don't think so.
- BILL: Big chance to let Faulkner catch his breath. All those long sentences get him pretty tired.
- BETTY: Thanks anyway.
- 170 BILL: Okay.
- BETTY: I appreciate the invitation.
- BILL: Sure thing. (*Bell.*) You weren't waiting for somebody when I came in, were you?
- BETTY: No, just reading.
- BILL: Sort of a sad occupation for a Friday night, isn't it? Reading here all by yourself?
- 175 BETTY: I guess I was trying to think of it as existentially romantic. You know—cappuccino, great literature, rainy night . . .
- BILL: That only works in Paris. We *could* hop the late plane to Paris. Get on a Concorde. Find a café . . .
- BETTY: I'm a little short on plane fare tonight.
- BILL: Darn it, so am I.
- BETTY: To tell you the truth, I was headed to the movies after I finished this section.
- Would you like to come along? Since you can't locate a waiter?
- BILL: That's a very nice offer, but . . .
- BETTY: Uh-huh. Girlfriend?
- BILL: Two, actually. One of them's pregnant, and Stephanie— (*Bell.*)
- BETTY: Girlfriend?
- BILL: No, I don't have a girlfriend. Not if you mean the castrating bitch I dumped last night. (*Bell.*)
- BETTY: Girlfriend?
- BILL: Sort of. Sort of.
- BETTY: What's a sort-of girlfriend?
- BILL: My mother. (*Bell.*) I just ended a relationship, actually.
- BETTY: Oh.
- 190 BILL: Of rather long standing.
- BETTY: I'm sorry to hear it.
- BILL: This is my first night out alone in a long time. I feel a little bit at sea, to tell you the truth.
- BETTY: So you didn't stop to talk because you're a Moonie, or you have some weird political affiliation—?
- BILL: Nope. Straight-down-the-ticket Republican. (*Bell.*) Straight-down-the-ticket Democrat. (*Bell.*) Can I tell you something about politics? (*Bell.*) I like to think of myself as a citizen of the universe. (*Bell.*) I'm unaffiliated.
- 195 BETTY: That's a relief. So am I.
- BILL: I vote my beliefs.
- BETTY: Labels are not important.
- BILL: Labels are not important, exactly. Like me, for example. I mean, what does it matter if I had a two-point at—(*bell*)—three-point at (*bell*)—four-point at college, or if I did come from Pittsburgh—(*bell*)—Cleveland—(*bell*)—Westchester County?
- BETTY: Sure.
- 200 BILL: I believe that a man is what he is. (*Bell.*) A person is what he is. (*Bell.*) A person is . . . what they are.
- BETTY: I think so too.