

The Critics



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Adapted from the play by St. John Greer Ervine

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*"I desire to acknowledge my debt
to the dramatic critics of Dublin
for much of the dialogue in this play."*

—St. John Greer Ervine

The Critics

4

The Critics was first performed at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, Ireland, on November 20, 1913: Lennox Robinson, producer.

MR. BARBARY: J. M. Kerrigan

MR. QUACKS: Fred O'Donovan

MR. QUARTZ: Sydney J. Morgan

MR. BAWLAWNEY: Arthur Sinclair

ATTENDANT: H. E. Hutchinson

The Critics

COMEDY. Adapted from the play by St. John Greer Ervine. A local newspaper reporter, who usually covers city council but is filling in for the drama critic, arrives on the opening night of a new foreign play. In the lobby, he meets three other theatre critics. One critic couldn't understand what the play was about but noticed there was a ghost onstage, a mad person, and some "bad" language. A second critic thinks the play is about leprechauns or fairies, a young fellow who lost his dad, and a girl who sings silly songs. A third critic thinks the play is corrupting the minds and souls of the American people and wants to get the local school board members to censor the play like they do library books. Before leaving the theater, the critics notice that the title of the play is *The Tragedy of Hamlet* written by a guy named Shakespeare, who they think must be some sort of foreigner—most likely a Canadian or Mexican. This witty, satirical play features a strong ensemble cast.

Performance time: Approximately 30 minutes.

About the Story

Irish dramatist, novelist, and critic St. John Greer Ervine (1883-1971) was born in East Belfast and later moved to London in 1901. He worked as an insurance clerk, but eventually became involved with theater. Ervine became the manager of the Abbey Theater in 1915 and was known for severely criticizing the plays being produced at that time.

Characters

(1 M, 4 flexible)

BARBARY: Local newspaper reporter who usually covers city council but is filling in for the drama critic; doesn't like tragedies or foreign plays; flexible.

QUACKS: Critic who thinks the play is corrupting the minds and souls of the American people and wants to get the local school board members to protest/censor the play like they do library books; male

QUARTZ: Critic who can't understand what the play is about but noticed there was a ghost onstage, a mad person, and some "bad" language; flexible.

BAWLAWNEY: Critic who thinks the play is about leprechauns or fairies, a young fellow who lost his dad, and a girl who goes out of her mind and sings silly songs; flexible.

ATTENDANT: Theatre attendant/usher; flexible.

Setting

Theatre lobby, evening.

Set

Theatre lobby. There are some lobby chairs.

Props

National Enquirer

Reporter's notebook

Pen

Piece of paper

Theater program

Sound Effects

Applause

**"Mebbe if you were
to translate 'Shakespeare'
from Canadian into English
it means 'Jones.'"**

—Barbary

The Critics

(AT RISE: Theatre lobby, evening. A new play is being performed for the first time. The last act is about to begin. Barbary enters and approaches a theatre Attendant.)

BARBARY: Is this the [Insert name of theatre]?

ATTENDANT: It is.

BARBARY: Oh, dear. I was never in the place before. *(Looks around.)* It isn't much of a buildin', is it?

ATTENDANT: Ah, it's not so bad, sir.

BARBARY: The [Insert the name of another] theatre is bigger. You know that's what I go by...the size of the theatre. The bigger they are, the better they are. This used to be a morgue at one time, wasn't it?

ATTENDANT: I believe it was.

BARBARY: That's a bad end for a morgue...bein' turned into a theatre. They're doin' a new play here tonight, aren't they?

ATTENDANT: They are.

BARBARY: How's the play going? Any fights break out?

ATTENDANT: I haven't heard anything yet, but the play's not over.

BARBARY: Ah, well, that's all I came to find out about. I couldn't get here any sooner, and if there had been a fight, and me not here, it would have been very awkward for me.

ATTENDANT: Why? Are you a security guard?

BARBARY: No, I'm a dramatic critic...for the time bein', anyhow. I don't do this sort of work regularly. I'm only doin' it to help out. I generally report on the proceedings of the city council. Now, that's good fun! Dramatic criticism's nothin' compared to that. I never was in this hole in my life before, but I'd bet you there's more excitement at a city council meeting in two minutes than in this theatre in two years. Whew! When there's a riot at city hall— *(Slight pause as he relishes the memory.)* The reporter who usually does this

is sick, so they asked to me fill in. What sort of a play is it?
Do you know?

ATTENDANT: I don't know. I haven't had time to see it yet.

Why don't you go in and watch it?

BARBARY: Oh, I'm all right where I am. (*Sits in a lobby chair.*)

Have you got a liquor license here?

ATTENDANT: No, but we can let you have some lemonade
or coffee.

BARBARY: Oh, I know now why the place isn't popular.

(*With disgust, scoffs.*) Coffee or lemonade?! I suppose this
piece is one of these... (*Makes an ugly face.*) ...*British* plays.

ATTENDANT: I'm not sure. They've been doin' some foreign
plays lately.

BARBARY: Foreign plays! Why foreign plays?! You're only
encouragin' foreigners, doin' that. That's all! Of course, it
has nothin' to do with me. I'm not much for plays. What I
like is a good song an' dance...somethin' with a bit of go in
it. Now, there was a woman used to come to the [Insert
name of a theatre]... (*Waves Attendant over.*) Here, come
here, and let me tell you. (*Attendant doesn't move. Approaches
and bends confidentially over Attendant.*) She used to sing a
song. I can hardly remember the name of it, but it was
somethin' like this. (*Sings a few lines of a terrible song.*) Have
you ever heard that song?

ATTENDANT: I have not.

BARBARY: Now, that's what I call a song! It has a bit of
meanin' in it, a song like that. I bet you don't hear songs like
that in this place.

ATTENDANT: No. No, you don't.

BARBARY: This is one of those high-class theatres, isn't
it...where they play *intellectual* things?

ATTENDANT: I've heard it called that.

BARBARY: I thought as much by the look of it. (*Looks around
and makes an ugly face.*) Tumblin' to bits! You know, that's
what's the matter with the place. They ought to bring it up
to date. Two shows a night, that's the style. Now, supposin'

they were to turn it into a movie theatre or an arena where you could hear a good song an' dance, with performin' elephants an' a comic juggler. Man alive! The place would be a gold mine! What's the good of writin' plays? Who do you think cares a curse about high-class stuff in this country? Nobody! Only a lot of hippies, an' they haven't enough money between them to pay the gas bill, let alone the actors' salaries. I met one of these hippies the other day an' he was foamin' at the mouth about the demise of theatre. Holy smoke! I thought the man was demented! What does anyone want with plays when you've got cable TV? You ought to have seen the look on his face when I said that! *(Bursts into guffaws of laughter.)* What's the name of the head of this place...the chap who writes plays?

ATTENDANT: Do you mean — ?

BARBARY: Aye, that's his name. *(Laughs.)* Do you know I tried to read a book of his one time, and I couldn't make anythin' out of it at all?! I was raised in [Insert name of nearby town], you know, and they haven't much use for plays up there. That's the secret of [Insert name of nearby town] greatness. But all the same, we know what a good play is. I learned about plays in school, but I never learned anythin' the likes of this stuff. Well, anyway, what I wanted to say was this: If I was to go to the head of this place and tell him about my plan for popularizin' his theatre, what do you think he'd pay me for my ideas?

ATTENDANT: I wouldn't like to say...

BARBARY: Do you think he wouldn't entertain the proposal?

ATTENDANT: I'm not sure...

BARBARY: Well, they'll have to do somethin' with it. I hear the place isn't popular at all. The dramatic critic at the paper can't bear it. He says to me the other day, "They don't want a dramatic critic round there," says he, "they want a sanitary inspector." *(Guffaws.)* That was his sarcasm. "An' I'm not that," says he. "Don't worry about it," says I. *(Indicating*

reporter.) It's him that's sick. It's not much of a job, you know, bein' a dramatic critic in [*Insert name of local town.*]

ATTENDANT: Isn't it?

BARBARY: No. That's what they start you on when you're learnin' your job as a reporter. An' if you show any signs of talent at all... (*Proudly.*) ...they promote you to the city council beat. An' then if you're any good, they send you to cover high school football. I'm one of the best reporters they have at the paper, an' I can tell you, it's a real come-down for me to be here tonight. (*Stage whisper.*) I don't want any of my friends to know I'm doin' this. (*Sighs.*) I'm too good-natured...I couldn't say no when they asked me to fill in. It's a pity you can't tell me anythin' about the play.

ATTENDANT: Well, I've heard it's a tragedy.

BARBARY: Tragedy?! (*Makes a noise with his tongue against his palate.*) What's the good of puttin' them things on the stage? Tragedies is happenin' every day. I saw a dog run over by a car on [*Insert name of local street*], an' it was a prize dog, too. I wrote a brief about it for the newspaper: "A Tragical Occurrence at [*Insert name of local street*]," but I'm sure you don't want the likes of that performed on the stage. I like laughin' an' enjoyin' myself, an' I'm not goin' to pay money to be made miserable. I tell you, you wouldn't want to see no tragedies if you worked at a newspaper. That's a tragedy in itself.

ATTENDANT: You ought to go in and see a bit of the play...

BARBARY: Oh, can't I ask someone about it as the people come out? All I want to know is...was there any disorder or a fight. My paper comes out in the evenin', an' they can easily copy the review that ran in the mornin' paper. (*Takes a copy of the National Enquirer out of his pocket.*) Man, there's a great story in this paper this week about a well-to-do young lady and her chauffeur. (*Waves Attendant over.*) Come on over here, an' I'll read it to you!

ATTENDANT: Ah, that's all right. I'd rather not.

(Barbary sits down on a chair and makes himself comfortable.)

BARBARY: Well, just as you like...but you're missin' a good thing. *(Scoffs.)* Mebbe you'd rather be watchin' the tragedy!

(Attendant strolls to the door of the theatre and stares out into the "street." Barbary hums a popular song. The door leading from the theatre to the lobby is flung violently open and Quacks enters.)

QUACKS: *(Shouts.)* Disgusting! Disgraceful! This is the worst outrage that has ever been perpetrated on the American people!

(Barbary throws his paper down and jumps up.)

BARBARY: *(Excitedly.)* Has there been a fight?! Is anyone hurt?!

(Applause is heard off from the "auditorium.")

QUACKS: A fight?! There ought to have been one, but there wasn't. *(Disgusted.)* Listen to them cheering! Listen to them! Oh, what is America coming to! I am glad that I did not bring my daughter to see this play!

BARBARY: Is it that bad?

QUACKS: Bad?! It's horrible! It's worse than [Insert title of play], and that was worse than [Insert title of play], and that was worse than [Insert title of play] and [Insert title of play]!

[END OF FREEVIEW]