

THE

Theatre Direct Canada in association
with Eldritch Theatre presents

BABYSITTER

A SLASHER PUPPET PLAY

by Eric Woolfe



Study Guide

by Sue Daniel

THEATRE DIRECT CANADA

THEATRE FOR YOUNG MINDS!



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present

Eric Woolfe's

The Babysitter

At the Factory Theatre Studio
Evenings from October 29 - November 12, 2006

Student Matinees : 1:00 to 2:20 pm
Optional Puppet Workshop: 2:30 to 3:15 pm

*Tuesday Oct. 31, Thursday Nov. 2, Friday Nov. 3,
Tuesday Nov. 7, Wednesday Nov. 8, Thursday Nov. 9*

Study Guide
by Sue Daniel

Exploring The Babysitter

I am not one of those who believe that civilization has to change in order for the theater to change; but I do believe that the theater, utilized in the highest and most difficult sense possible, has the power to influence the aspect and formation of things.

--Antonin Artaud

There is now and there has always been something about violence. But why do we love horror stories so much? Because Aristotle's 2000 year old theory remains true: the chief function of tragedy is to create both pity and fear which act as catharsis for the audience. A gathering of people can collectively experience and survive fears which an isolated individual would find too daunting to deal with: thus audiences keep turning to "violence + horror + blood + gore" stories on stage and screen for their presumed capacities to purge, to please, to frighten, to civilize, and to instill empathy as a response to the paradoxes of law, death, entertainment, and morality.

All of the ideas which resonate in *The Babysitter* --a "slasher puppet play" which can perhaps best be understood as contemporary urban folklore--have their deepest roots in the archetypal characters, violent imagery and good vs evil plotlines of classical legends and drama, medieval drama, folk and fairy tales, revenge tragedies, the Grand Guignol and in 19th and 20th century imaginative fiction on film -- fantasy, science fiction, horror. Today these ideas must also be viewed through the twin lens of psychological and literary analysis, whose theories and vocabularies permeate the last hundred years and influence, consciously or otherwise, much of what we create, read and see.

This **Study Guide** provides teachers with resources which can be used as **background information**, **preparatory activities** and **follow up materials** for *The Babysitter* within the six periods and genres mentioned above.

- The **background information** provides teachers with information about the plot, themes and references within the play, the playwright's vision, set and costume design, puppet design and manipulation, and biographies of the playwright, director, designers, and actors/puppeteers. Four Core Resources are included in print, and there are three weblinks which supply additional information. These can be delivered orally to students, or be 'cut and pasted' as desired for handouts to a group or class prior to seeing the play.
- The **preparatory activities** are completely optional--teachers will know best which--if any-- of these will be useful in engaging their students' interest in the time available, which best fit the purposes for which the group is being taken to see *The Babysitter*, and how each one might mesh with planned follow up activities.
- The **follow up materials** are based on the assumption that teachers are best able to decide which of the six strands are most relevant to curriculum objectives, to the unit currently being taught in the class, and to the students' maturity, background and interests; thus specific activities are most likely to be challenging and interesting when the teacher utilizes selected resources --from those provided in this Study Guide and its web links, or other sources they already have, or those available in the English or Drama department, the public library or on line--to personally create these activities.

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Note that the sources *in red* are all in the print and online versions of the Study Guide while those *in blue* can be accessed as weblinks

Background Information:

Plot Synopsis for *The Babysitter*
The Playwright's Vision: Eric Woolfe
The Director's Comments: Michael Waller
Production Notes: costume & set design; puppet design, creation & manipulation; stage management
Introducing the Artists
Theories, Themes and Techniques: Objectives
Core Resources:
 #1 :The Power of Archetype
 #2 : Distancing the Audience: Scary but not TOO Scary
 #3: The Slasher Films of the 70's and 80's: the Birth of the Final Girl
 #4: Urban Legends in Popular Culture
Works Cited and Websites List

Weblinks for this section:

Live Animation for the Stage: history and theory of puppetry
Eric Woolfe's Inimitable Annotated Slasher Film Index
Silent Screams: An All-Time Best List of Horror Films

Preparatory Activities:

The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari
Top Ten Rules for Slasher Movies
Exploring Urban Legends

Follow Up Materials:

An introduction to each strand is followed by script excerpts or stories, and a selection of essays providing historical background and literary analysis for the teacher; most would also be interesting and appropriate for students.

Introduction to Myth, Drama & Literature

Classical Theatre in Greece and Rome

Introduction

Historical and theatrical notes on classical theatre and its aftermath ~ Sue Daniel
Excerpt from *Oedipus the King* ~ Sophocles
Excerpt from *Medea* ~ Euripedes
Essay: Why Study Theatre History? ~ Sue Daniel
Essay: Tragic Catharsis ~ excerpt from Theodore Hatlen's *Drama: Principles and Plays*

Medieval Theatre in England and Europe

Introduction

Historical and theatrical notes on medieval theatre: mystery, miracle and morality plays ~ Sue Daniel
Excerpt from *The Harrowing of Hell* ~ The Chester Pageant Cycle
Excerpt from *The Judgment* ~ The York Pageant Cycle
Images from Medieval Art: Scaring Them Away from Sin

Folk & Fairy Tales

Introduction

Folk tale: Little Red Cap ~ the original Grimm Brothers version

Folk tale: The Monkey Bridegroom ~ Japanese tale

Folk tale: The Vampire Skeleton ~ Iroquois tale

Essay: Divined from Inside ~ excerpt from Bruno Bettelheim's *The Uses of Enchantment*

Essay: Why Are Americans Afraid of Dragons? ~ excerpt from an essay by Ursula K. LeGuin in *The Language of the Night*

The Revenge Tragedies

Introduction

Excerpt from *The Duchess of Malfi* ~ John Webster

Excerpt from *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* ~ John Ford

Essay: The Roots of Jacobean Tragedy in the Elizabethan Age ~ excerpt from Una Ellis-Fermor's classic historical and literary analysis, *The Jacobean Drama: An Interpretation* (1936)

The Grand Guignol

Introduction

Entire script: *At the Telephone* ~ Andre de Lorde, 1902 ~ e text from www.gaslight.mtroyal.ab.ca

Essay: The History of Le Théâtre du Grand-Guignol ~ from the journal *Grand Street*, 1996

Essay: Gore and Glory of the Grand Guignol ~ from *Callboard* magazine, 1996

Imaginative Fiction

Introduction

Essay: Heroic Literature: Larger than Life ~ from *Myth and Meaning*

Essay: Phases of the Heroic Quest ~ Sue Daniel

Essay: Fairy Tale vs Myth ~ Bruno Bettelheim, from *The Uses of Enchantment*

Essay: The Child and the Shadow ~ Ursula K. LeGuin, from *The Language of the Night*

Essay: Myth and Archetype in Science Fiction ~ Ursula K. LeGuin, from *The Language of the Night*

Essay: Futuristic Fiction ~ William Leiss, from www.herasaga.com/downloads



*Audrey Dwyer
in rehearsal
as Nikki-- the
Babysitter--
with the twins
she is babysitting
that fateful night--
Joey and Didi*