The Browning Version

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF TERENCE RATTIGAN

Terence Mervyn Rattigan was the son of Vera and William Rattigan, and was born just before the coronation of George V. Rattigan's father was a diplomat and hoped his son would one day work in the civil service. Coming from an upper-middle class background, Rattigan received a typical education, attending Harrow School before enrolling at Oxford. A childhood trip to the theatre brought on an early obsession with the art form; at Harrow, Rattigan devoured the school library's collection of plays. While at Oxford, Rattigan's desire to be a playwright was so strong that he dropped out in order to write. Rattigan found relatively early success with his 1936 play *French Without Tears*. When World War II came, Rattigan served in the Royal Air Force as a tail gunner. After the war, he had a run of popular and critically well-received plays, such as *The Winslow Boy* and *The Browning Version*, firmly establishing him as a major playwright. Not long after, however, his plays fell out of favor as new and younger playwrights—like the "Angry Young Men"—grew dominant. Rattigan continued to work, producing what are now considered some of his best plays. In 1971, Rattigan received a knighthood from Queen Elizabeth, only the fourth playwright in the 20th Century to receive the honor. Towards the end of his life, Rattigan saw a revival in popularity in Britain, before dying from bone cancer at the age of 66 in Bermuda.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Browning Version gives no instruction as to the precise date or time in which it is set. However, it is generally acknowledged that Rattigan drew on his own experiences as a schoolboy to write the play; like his character, Taplow, he too had been taught Classics by a strict disciplinarian who left Oxford with a rare double-first grade. The play, then, probably takes place in the inter-war period. It deals fundamentally with an attitude prevalent in British middle-to-upper-class life at the time: the "stiff upper-lip," which owes a lot to the Victorian era. That is, the play is concerned with the suppression of the emotions, the idea that people should just "grin and bear" their hardships rather than showing any great display of feeling. The phrase itself relates to the trembling of the upper lip often displayed by people at times of emotional upset, fear, or distress. It wasn't long after the Second World War that the U.K. started to feel like a more liberated, emotionally expressive place (with the youth in particular) and the attitude described above began to seem increasingly old-fashioned and restrictive. It's no coincidence that Rattigan's popularity diminished in tandem with this cultural shift, though from the 1970s onwards his reputation improved.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The Browning Version is a finely worked play and widely considered to be Rattigan's masterpiece. Rattigan's specific inspiration for authoring the play was in a way a negative one. Annoyed by the deflation of dramatic tension caused by intervals at the theater, Rattigan set out to write four separate one-act plays that would work as individual pieces without the need for interruption. His plan to write four became a concentration on two, and *The Browning Version* was subsequently often performed as part of a two-play bill alongside *Harlequinade*. The one-act format dates back as far as ancient Greece. That's not the only significant influence from antiquity, given that Aeschylus's tragedy *Agamemnon* plays such a central role in *The Browning Version*. Aeschylus's play is both a physical object in the play, firstly as the object of study for Andrew Crocker-Harris' student, Taplow, and secondly as the leaving gift Taplow gives to his teacher in the form of Robert Browning's verse translation, thus giving the play its title. But Aeschylus's harrowing play informs *The Browning Version* in another subtle but no less important way. It tells the story of a murderous wife, Clytemnestra, who kills her husband, Agamemnon. Though no actual murder takes place in Rattigan's play, it too deals with a wife who hates her husband, and in this case she seeks to murder any last chance at happiness he may have. Rattigan's wider influences include the work of George Bernard Shaw, Henrik Ibsen, and even Anton Chekhov (e.g. *The Seagull*). As a play set exclusively in the Crocker-Harrises' front room, *The Browning Version* is also an example of the "drawing-room play," in which all the action takes place in a singular location that allows for visitors to come and go. The play also follows Aristotle's principles of unity—of setting, time, and action. Accordingly, Rattigan's plays share some common ground with Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* and especially the works of Noël Coward.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Browning Version*
- **When Written:** 1948
- **Where Written:** London, U.K.
- **When Published:** 1948
- **Literary Period:** Post-war
- **Genre:** Drama
- **Setting:** A teacher's flat in a south England public school for boys

- **Climax:** John Taplow gives Andrew Crocker-Harris his gift
- **Antagonist:** Millie Crocker-Harris

EXTRA CREDIT

Audience Stereotypes. Rattigan once described his ideal audience member as an Aunt Edna: "a nice, respectable, middle-class, middle-aged, maiden lady, with time on her hands and the money to help her pass it. She enjoys pictures, books, music and the theatre and though to none of these arts … does she bring much knowledge or discernment, at least, as she is apt to tell her cronies, she 'does know what she likes'. Let us call her Aunt Edna." It took some time and no little protestation for him to live this down.

Identity. Rattigan was gay, and homosexuality was only made legal in the U.K. four years after his knighthood.

PLOT SUMMARY

The Browning Version begins in the sitting-room of a flat that is spacious and cheerfully decorated, if a little dark and gloomy. It is the on-site home of Andrew Crocker-Harris and his resentful wife, Millie, provided to them as part of Andrew's employment at a public school for boys in the south of England. It's between six and seven p.m. in July, and today is the final day of the school year. Due to his poor health, today also represents Andrew's final day of employment as a teacher of Classics at the school before he moves—on doctor's orders—to a less strenuous job elsewhere.

John Taplow, a schoolboy aged sixteen, enters the room and calls out for "Sir!"—meaning his teacher, Andrew. He lets himself in hesitantly and pinches a chocolate from a box he notices on the table. Taplow picks up a walking stick and begins practicing his golf swing. Just at this moment, Frank Turner, one of the younger and more popular teachers at the school, comes in. He offers Taplow advice on his swing and the two of them get into a conversation. Taplow tells Frank that he has been summoned by Andrew for extra work because of missing a day in the previous week with flu. He also informs Frank that he is hoping to switch to Frank's science class in the new academic year but is waiting on Mr. Crocker-Harris's approval for "remove"—which, if it was any other teacher than "the Crock," would already have been granted. Encouraged by Frank's laidback air, Taplow performs a mocking impression of Andrew, reciting the exact words his teacher has to say on the "remove": "My dear Taplow, I have given you exactly what you deserve. No less; and certainly no more." On Frank's invitation, Taplow repeats his impression, with neither of them aware that Millie has just entered the flat.

After greeting Frank, Millie sends Taplow to the pharmacist to get Andrew's heart medicine made up. Exiting the room, Taplow begs Frank to ensure that Millie doesn't tell Andrew about his impersonation. With Taplow gone, it becomes clear that Frank and Millie are having an affair, though Millie appears the more committed of the two. They make plans to see each other in September in Bradford, though Frank seems reticent. Millie kisses Frank, telling her she loves him—but he is nervous about Andrew returning. Millie tells Frank she heard Taplow's imitation of Andrew and says flirtatiously that Frank was "very naughty" to encourage him. Acknowledging his overly jovial relationship with the boys at the school, Frank says it was a choice between that or the "petty, soulless tyranny" that Andrew uses to maintain discipline, and adds that he doesn't think Andrew should ever have become a teacher. Millie relates that Andrew had once been inspired by his "vocation," even aiming to become headmaster one day, but lost his passion along the way.

Changing the subject, Millie asks why Frank did not sit with her and Andrew at the school's recent cricket match, instead choosing to sit with one of the other schoolmasters' wives. He protests his innocence, saying he'd "clean forgot." She says that, though she knows he doesn't love her, he ought to behave in a way sympathetic to the fact that she loves him. Half-joking, she adds that if Frank doesn't come to Bradford in September, she'll kill herself.

Andrew comes in through the door. After a brief conversation expressing his slight annoyance that Millie has sent Taplow away—rather than having the prescription delivered—he greets Frank. He shows Frank the new timetable he has made for the following term, a task that he has done each year during his long employment at the school.

Taplow comes back, prompting Frank to leave so that Andrew's lesson can commence. Millie also exits to the kitchen to prepare dinner. Andrew and Taplow sit down at the table. Taplow's task is to arduously translate out loud lines from Aeschylus's Greek tragedy, **The Agamemnon**. As he does so, Andrew makes frequent interjections to correct Taplow. In a sudden flash of inspiration, Taplow embellishes one of the lines, making it more dramatic and gruesome; the line in question concerns the moment just after Clytemnestra has murdered her husband, Agamemnon. Andrew chastises his pupil for adding words that weren't in the original line, but suddenly seems contemplative and emotional. He tells Taplow that in his youth he had put great effort into his own translation of *The Agamemnon*, producing a text that was perhaps even more beautiful than the original—though it was never published.

The entrance of Dr. Frobisher, the school headmaster, interrupts the lesson and Taplow is dismissed. Though outwardly charming and warm, Dr. Frobisher has two items of bad news for Andrew. Firstly, Andrew has been refused his pension by the school governors because he is not quite of retirement age—and despite an exception having been made for a similar case recently. Secondly, Dr. Frobisher wants to

switch the order of speakers in the end-of-term ceremony: whereas a teacher of Andrew's seniority would normally take the final "headline" slot, Dr. Frobisher wants to swap the running order so that a younger and more popular teacher ends the assembly on a "climax." Andrew meekly accepts both decisions. The headmaster leaves, complimenting Millie's beauty on his way out.

Now alone with Andrew, Millie asks him about the pension decision. She is furious with him for not putting up a fight, betting that he just "sat there and made a joke in Latin." Continuing her tirade, she accuses him of wanting to live off her money (which comes from her father's business) and of neglecting the husband's responsibility to support his wife. She's less bothered about the change in speaking order at the assembly; Dr. Frobisher had in fact asked for her opinion a week before.

This heated discussion is interrupted by the arrival of Mr. Peter Gilbert and Mrs. Gilbert. They are fresh-faced newly-weds and have come to see the flat they will live in next term when Peter takes over Andrew's teaching position. Millie shows Mrs. Gilbert around. Meanwhile, Andrew and Peter have a conversation in which Peter admits he is worried about being able to maintain discipline with his pupils. He clumsily lets slip that Dr. Frobisher calls Andrew the "Himmler of the fifth"—after one of the top Nazi commanders—for his strict authoritarian manner. Andrew is evidently upset at the nickname and opens up to Peter about his teaching career. He says he knew from the beginning that he didn't have the "knack" for making himself liked, but he at least tried to communicate to his pupils some of his "joy in the great literature of the past." He judges that he failed, most of the time. Though he knows he isn't liked, he is still surprised to learn that he is feared, and blames his failure on "a sickness of the soul." Suddenly embarrassed, he tries to restore decorum with Peter. Millie and Mrs. Gilbert come back in and, after some awkward goodbyes, the young couple leave.

Millie leaves the room. Andrew, now alone, seems to be making a concerted effort to hold in his emotions. To Andrew's surprise, Taplow returns, saying he wishes to bid his teacher goodbye and good luck. He offers him a gift: the Robert Browning translation of *The Agamemnon*. Andrew doesn't realize the book is for him. Andrew hands it back to Taplow, telling him that over time he might get to like Browning's version. Taplow explains that the book is a gift, and that he has written an inscription in the fly-leaf. Andrew reads the inscription and is deeply moved. He asks Taplow to fetch his medicine and spasms with emotion, which he is unable to hide on Taplow's return. Frank enters and Andrew, with evident pride, shows him what Taplow has written, translating it to: "God from afar looks graciously upon a gentle master" (a quote from *The Agamemnon*). Andrew is once again overcome by his emotion. On Frank's signal, Taplow says goodbye and leaves.

Andrew apologizes to Frank for making a fool of himself in front of him and Taplow, but Frank is sympathetic.

Millie comes back in. Learning of Taplow's gift, she dismisses it as an "artful" attempt to get Andrew to grant Taplow's "remove." With scarcely-hidden glee she also informs Andrew of Taplow's earlier impersonation of him. Andrew puts down the book and goes to his room. Frank expresses his disgust at Millie for her treatment of Andrew and tells her that their affair is finished. She slaps him, but insists that everything will be all right when he comes to Bradford.

As Andrew comes back, Millie leaves the room. Andrew and Frank have a glass of sherry and Frank says that, while Taplow had indeed impersonated Andrew, he had also expressed his respect and admiration. Andrew dismisses this information, claiming that he doesn't care what Frank or Taplow think of him. Frank offers Andrew some last words of advice: that he should leave Millie. Andrew asks if that is so that Frank can more easily continue his affair with her. Frank is deeply shocked to learn of Andrew's knowledge of the illicit relationship, but Andrew explains that Frank is by no means the first lover that Millie has had behind his back. In fact, she tells him everything. Andrew laments that he and Millie were doomed to hate each other because their "two kinds of love" were incompatible from the very beginning.

Andrew dismisses his earlier displays of emotion as "the muscular twitchings of a corpse." Frank insists that a corpse can be revived, and expresses a wish to visit Andrew in September at his new school in Dorset. Despite Andrew's protestations, Frank puts a date in the calendar and, as Millie returns into the room, makes Andrew give him the new school's address. Frank then shakes Andrew's hand and departs.

Millie laughs at Andrew for inviting Frank to stay with him, but Andrew explains that it was Frank's own idea. Millie insists that, instead of visiting Andrew in Dorset, Frank will join her in Bradford. Andrew replies that the likeliest scenario is that Frank will go to neither of them. As they sit down for dinner, Andrew tells Millie that, instead of himself going to Bradford in the months prior to his new job, he will stay at the current school. She tells him not to expect her to come to Dorset; he replies that neither of them has the right to expect anything from the other. Just at the moment the phone rings. It's Dr. Frobisher with some questions about the school timetable drawn up by Andrew. Andrew takes the opportunity to tell Dr. Frobisher that he has changed his mind about the order of speakers in the assembly and insists on taking his rightful slot at the end. He ends the conversation saying that he is "of the opinion that occasionally an anti-climax can be surprisingly effective." Hanging up the phone, he and Millie sit down to dinner.

CHARACTERS

Andrew Crocker-Harris – Andrew Crocker-Harris is the protagonist of the play. He is a taciturn, middle-aged teacher of Classics and has clearly had his spirit worn down over the years. There is no love left in his marriage to Millie, who openly has affairs with other men. The play represents his penultimate day at the school in which he has worked since graduating with prestigious honors from university; on doctor's orders, he is moving to a job that will place considerably less strain on his poor health. This sense of finality, then, forces him to confront who he is and how his life has turned out. Andrew cultivates an atmosphere of intimidation with his pupils and knows he is generally disliked, while with his peers he strives to maintain a distance and betray no suggestion of inner feeling. That said, he confesses to his young successor, Mr. Gilbert, that he once held lofty ideals of imparting his "joy" for great literature to his pupils, and by and large he considers himself to have failed. Though he was keenly aware of his lack of likeability, he is genuinely shocked to learn that his headmaster, Dr. Frobisher, refers to him as "the Himmler of the fifth"—a nickname after a tyrannical Nazi commander. The school does not seem to have much respect for Andrew, despite his many years of service. They refuse him his pension, and Dr. Frobisher asks him to speak first at the end-of-term assembly, rather than in the "headline" slot that is his right as a senior teacher. Though Andrew initially accepts his fate with meek resignation, his pupil Taplow's gift of **The Agamemnon** (Robert Browning's version) and the inscription it contains awaken a latent sense of emotion in him. This reconnection with his emotional self and subsequent confrontation with his life to date gives Andrew a quiet defiance in the play's closing moments. Speaking again to the headmaster, Andrew insists on his rightful place in the assembly speaking order, hinting at the possibility that he will take a more active and determined role in his own life going forward. Taplow's inscription, a quote from play, hints at the way Rattigan wants the audience to perceive Andrew: "God from afar looks graciously upon a gentle master."

Millie Crocker-Harris – Millie is Andrew's younger wife who over the years has grown increasingly bitter towards her husband. She maintains an air of gracious civility with all who visit their apartment but treats Andrew with callous hatred whenever the two are alone. She is having an affair with Frank Hunter, and expresses her love for him despite knowing that his feelings are not as strong. In a deliberate attempt to hurt Andrew, she dismisses Taplow's gift of **The Agamemnon** (in Robert Browning's translation) as a cynical attempt to win Andrew's favor. Millie resents Andrew for many reasons. She views him as a failure, who failed to capitalize on his early promise in life. She is angry with Andrew for meekly accepting the school governors' decision not to grant him a pension and, more generally, with his inability to provide for her financially. At the end of the play she informs Andrew that she will not go with him to his new employment, strongly suggesting that their marriage has come to an end. In a rare show of strength, Andrew dismisses what she says with indifference, rather than allow it to hurt him.

John Taplow – Taplow is one of Andrew's Classics students. He is the first character to appear in the play, summoned to the Crocker-Harrises' flat to do extra work due to his absence from a lesson the previous week. Though Taplow is evidently intimidated by Andrew's stern demeanor, he expresses to Frank a respect and admiration for his departing teacher. Taplow's actions create the emotional peak of the play. Having been dismissed from Andrew's flat, Taplow surprises his teacher by returning to wish him goodbye. He gifts Andrew a book bought with his own money: **The Agamemnon** translated by Robert Browning ("the Browning version"). In it Taplow has inscribed a quote from the play (which he has been studying in Andrew's class), which translates as "God from afar looks graciously upon a gentle master." Andrew is deeply moved by the gift, erupting in spasms of emotion. Millie dismisses the present as Taplow's attempt to gain favor with Andrew, who holds the power to decide if Taplow will get a desired "remove" into Frank Hunter's science class the following term. Though Rattigan provides no conclusive answer to the question of Taplow's motives, it seems most likely that Taplow's actions are sincere and genuinely heartfelt.

Frank Hunter – Frank Hunter is the dynamic young science teacher who is having an affair with Millie Crocker-Harris. He is well-liked by the pupils at the school but fears that his relationship with them is too informal and friendly, undermining his efforts as an educator. Frank's sympathy for Andrew grows over the course of the play and he is deeply appalled by the callous way in which Millie dismisses Taplow's gift to Andrew as a cynical attempt to gain favor. By the end of the play, Frank tells Millie that their affair is over and asks Andrew if he can visit him at his new school.

Dr. Frobisher – Dr. Frobisher is the school headmaster. He has a charming if somewhat superficial manner and primarily serves to deliver two items of bad news to Andrew. The first is that Andrew has been refused his pension; the second is that he wants Andrew to be the first speaker in the school assembly, rather than Andrew taking the closing slot that his seniority would normally deserve.

Peter Gilbert – Peter Gilbert is the fresh-faced young teacher set to take over Andrew's apartment in the new school term. He expresses to Andrew his nervousness at the teaching work to come, and clumsily lets slip that Dr. Frobisher, the headmaster, has nicknamed Andrew the "Himmler of the fifth." Peter is keen to get Andrew's advice on teaching, and gives him the opportunity to reflect on the failures of his career. Peter leaves clearly embarrassed by his interactions with Andrew and seems painfully aware of the hurt his throwaway "Himmler"

comment has caused.

Mrs. Gilbert – Mrs. Gilbert is the young woman married to Peter Gilbert. While she doesn't say much in the play, what she does say generally demonstrates an enthusiastic attitude to life with a hopeful attitude towards the future. She takes an excited look around Andrew and Millie's flat, evidently eager to make it her own when she and her husband take it over in the new term.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

PERSONAL SUCCESS AND FAILURE

Terrence Rattigan's *The Browning Version* is a poignant critique of the way a person's worth is measured by their "successes" and "failures," and how these come to govern an individual's life and way of being. Focusing on schoolmaster Andrew Crocker-Harris's final day of serious employment, Rattigan manages over the course of the play to subtly suggest the flaws of evaluating life with such a crude measure as "success or failure," and asks the audience to assess whether quiet triumphs are, perhaps, as (or even more) valid than grand ambitions.

Though Andrew has another job lined up, the new work is to be of an easier, less consequential nature, in accordance with his doctor's recommendations. In a further stroke of misfortune, the school's governors have refused Andrew's request for a pension on the grounds that he is not quite at the usual retirement age. Leaving, then, represents a termination of his life's ambitions—any ideas of career "progression" or "climbing" are to be left behind.

Though he is now a reserved and distant figure, the play offers clues to Andrew's earlier promise and ambition as a young man, allowing the audience to view the extent to which a person can change against the backdrop of their initial hopes and dreams. In his youth, Andrew was a prize-winning classical scholar of immense ability, graduating from Oxford with a rare double first grade. When he started his work as a schoolmaster, he intended to transmit his "joy" for the "great literature" of the past—terms on which he now considers himself to have failed. This sense of failure is compounded when Andrew learns that his own headteacher, Dr. Frobisher, describes him, in a gesture to his intimidating and widely disliked teaching manner, as the "Himmler of the fifth" (Himmler was a prominent leader of the Nazi regime). Rattigan shows how such perceptions of failure, when directed inwardly, can grind an individual down over the years and permeate their attitude to life more generally: Andrew's personal relationships—including with his own wife, Millie—are largely procedural, lacking in warmth or empathy. Rattigan thus demonstrates the dangers people face when they measure their self-worth by rigid notions of success and failure—too much of this turns them into a living "corpse," to use Andrew's own word.

But Rattigan is careful to offer a glimpse of how an individual can begin to restore their sense of self-possession and vitality: by redefining the terms on which they judge their life to be successful or not. To this end, John Taplow, Andrew's sixteen-year-old student, provides the play's one true act of kindness and arguably its most important single act. Taplow, having earlier expressed a private admiration for Andrew despite the latter's apparent lack of "feelings," returns unexpectedly to Andrew's flat to say his goodbyes and give his teacher a leaving gift. This is **The Agamemnon** translated by Robert Browning (giving the play its title) and is bought using Taplow's own pocket money. The most important aspect of the gift is the inscription which Taplow has written. The quote (in ancient Greek) reads: "God from afar looks graciously upon a gentle master." Taplow thus offers Andrew a redemptive perspective on his life, suggesting that he deserves the respect and understanding of a master, and that his lack of sociability was more a reflection of his incompatibility with society's strict definition of success than some deeply embedded personal failure. In fact, as the quote is both well-chosen and transcribed perfectly in Greek, the inscription represents a quiet triumph of Andrew's teaching.

Andrew erupts with emotion at Taplow's gesture, and though he later tries to dismiss these spasms of feeling, his attitude to life after the gift is subtly—but markedly—different. In the play's closing scene, he faces up to his failed marriage and tells Millie the unflinchingly honest truth: that neither of them has any right to expect anything from the other. On top of this, he confronts an earlier instance of disrespect by insisting to Dr. Frobisher that he *will* speak last in the end-of-term assembly, as befits his status as a senior teacher (the headmaster had wanted to switch the order to give Andrew's slot to a younger, more popular figure). Subtly, then, Rattigan shows how a shift in perception—a freeing up of the restraining characteristics of a *particular kind* of success—empowers an individual to take control of their own world; and though it's not certain Andrew will follow through on this powerful shift, the possibility is suddenly there where previously it wasn't.

LOVE AND MARRIAGE

The Browning Version is in part an exploration of love and marriage, specifically a marriage that love has deserted long ago. Though Millie and Andrew have been together for a long time, it is clear that their relationship is merely one of perfunctory gestures—of "keeping up

appearances." Rattigan's play thus works to show the dangers of letting a bad marriage fester and worsen over the years, the way in which love gradually erodes into hatred. Andrew and Millie's marriage clearly displays the toxicity that can creep into a relationship if the two people involved don't work to improve their situation—in fact, they are a kind of case study in doing nothing and quietly accepting the consequences. Implicitly, then, Rattigan asks the audience to explore the nature of their own personal relationships and to watch out for the dangers embodied by Andrew and Millie.

Millie resents Andrew for his failures and seeks sexual gratification in an affair with a younger teacher, Frank Hunter. Andrew, meanwhile, has become more and more withdrawn, separate from the world around him. In their interactions with one another it's hard to see how Andrew and Millie were ever in love at all. The audience also learns that Frank is far from the first illicit lover that Millie has had, suggesting that this kind of behaviour has become normalized in their marriage. Rattigan implies that, if two people don't work to sort out their relationship or have the honesty to break it off, its tensions will find release in other ultimately more damaging ways. It's also worth remembering that the idea of divorce itself was a more gravely serious and taboo proposition at the time of the play's setting and writing than it is nowadays: Rattigan also shows the audience how marriage can trap two people when, ultimately, it is supposed to improve their lives.

Furthermore, Rattigan shows how the gradual breakdown in a marriage can turn into an atmosphere of emotional distance and resentment. Millie rarely behaves kindly towards Andrew, showing herself to be frustrated with his way of being and unsympathetic towards his emotions. She resents what she perceives as his weakness—his inability to stand up for himself—but instead of offering support through her own strength she can only find the energy to kick him when he's down. After Andrew is informed by the headteacher, Dr. Frobisher, that the school's governing committee has decided not to grant him a pension, Crocker-Harris is chastised by Millie for not disputing the decision. She says: "And what did you say? Just sat there and made a joke in Latin, I suppose?...What do they expect you to do? Live on my money, I suppose…Doesn't the marriage service say something about the husband supporting his wife?" Millie accuses Andrew—and perhaps fairly so—of neglecting his duties as a husband while also clearly demonstrating her own contempt for her role as a supportive wife.

Millie's greatest cruelty comes just after Andrew's student, Taplow, has given him a seemingly heartfelt gift: a copy of **The Agamemnon** (Robert Browning's translation) with an inscription that moves Andrew to a great outpouring of emotion. Millie, sensing Andrew's momentary happiness, purposefully demeans Taplow's action by suggesting it is motivated by his desire to win favor from Andrew in order to get a particular class next year (Andrew's decision). To add insult to injury, she also tells Andrew that she saw Taplow impersonating him earlier. Millie thus comes to embody an attitude of one person refusing another their happiness because that same happiness has ceased to seem possible for them themselves. She even spells this out to Frank: "Why should he [Andrew] be allowed his comforting little illusions? I'm not."

But Taplow's small gesture is of great importance to Andrew, because the sudden connection with his emotions that it gives him allows him to be more honest about his marriage—instead of wallowing in his apathy as usual. He believes that both he and Millie are deserving of pity, perhaps supporting the idea that the institution of marriage can fail people if, like Andrew suggests, both parties want "two kinds of love."

Interestingly, Andrew dismisses Millie's affairs out of hand, comparing the situation to the literary form of farce: "Merely the problem of an unsatisfied wife and a henpecked husband. You'll find it all over the world. It is usually, I believe, a subject for farce." Andrew, then, views his marriage in the context of his failures as an academic scholar and teacher. If his true goal in life was to become a "great man" of his subject—that is, to produce work deserving of fame and accolade—his failure to do so becomes the prism through which he also views his marriage. Having failed to achieve greatness in life, he plays down the tragedy of failing to achieve greatness in love, comparing it to a comedic literary form and showing his disinterest in his wife's betrayals.

Though this is a somewhat depressing state of mind, Andrew by this point is at least being honest with himself, owning up to the failures of his marriage instead of continuing to bury them under a blanket of resentment. Tentative as it is, then, Rattigan implies that there is redemption in honesty, and damnation in apathy—and though this unflinching frankness is new to Andrew, the audience senses that, after the action of the play itself is finished, he might just be able to save himself.

EMOTIONS AND REPRESSION

The Browning Version is a case study in a lifetime of emotional repression. Andrew Crocker-Harris has clearly taken the view in life that it is better to repress his emotions than to let them get the better of him, but the quiet sorrow that surrounds him suggests that this has been a grave error. Rattigan contrasts this repressed state with Andrew's rare emotional outbursts, which are brought on primarily by a leaving gift he receives from his student, John Taplow, and more widely informed by the psychological pressure he feels in leaving his life's work (or failure) behind. These sudden moments of emotion are shown to be vital—if brief—expressions of freedom from emotional repression, and it is in these that Andrew wins the sympathies of some of the other characters and the audience. Rattigan, then, makes the

audience question the worth of emotions in life more generally, showing them to be a powerful force in an individual's life that ultimately needs to be harnessed rather than dismissed.

Andrew's general mode of existence at the start of the play is best characterised as the "stiff upper lip"—an English term used to denote a supposedly stoic approach to life in which an individual refuses to let their emotions get the better of them. On the one hand, this could be a projection of a kind of strength; in this view, emotional outbursts are characterised as weakness and repression as self-control. But this philosophy is taken to its extreme by Andrew; instead of having agency over life, life is merely something which happens to him, and which he has accepted over the years with increasing passivity. There are three main examples of this: the first is Andrew's acceptance of his wife Millie's illicit affairs. The other two are both delivered to Andrew by the school headmaster, Dr. Frobisher, who informs him firstly that the school governors have refused his application for a pension and, secondly, that it would be preferred for Andrew to swap his speaking slot at the leaving assembly so that a more popular teacher can lend the occasion a proper "climax." Andrew accepts all of these without any resistance, clearly implying that his "stiff upper lip" is more like a weak backbone. Rattigan thus implores his audience to resist the idea that the repression of the emotions equates to inner strength. Given the playwright's secret homosexuality (which was still illegal at the time of the play's writing), this exploration of the hidden interior life seems all the more poignant.

With the above in mind, the seemingly innocuous action of John Taplow becomes the beating heart of the play. Taplow returns unexpectedly to Andrew's flat and brings a gift to wish his teacher farewell. The book Taplow gives him is **The Agamemnon**, which Andrew's class has recently been studying. Andrew feels that his efforts in teaching have rarely been successful, and that he has failed in most instances to get across his "joy" for the great literature of the past. The gift shows that at least one of his students respects this literature and has emotionally engaged with the material. What most affects Andrew is the inscription that Taplow writes in the book, which reads, "God from afar looks graciously upon a gentle master." Taplow has written this in Greek, and done so successfully, testifying in this instance to a rare success in Andrew's teaching. But what impacts Andrew more than the fact that he has evidently taught Taplow well is that the inscription displays great emotional sensitivity, offering a genuinely redemptive perspective on Andrew's teaching career. This subtle gesture of empathy and respect from Taplow gives Andrew license to reconnect with his own emotions, causing him to "sob uncontrollably." Rather than coming across as weakness, the audience sees this outpouring of feeling as a display of vitality, an expression of life itself that does justice to what it means to be human.

Taplow's gift, then, gently offers Andrew an alternative to emotional repression, with potentially hopeful consequences. In fact, it's after the gift that Andrew displays more strength of character. He discusses his life more frankly and unflinchingly, stands up to his wife, and in the last moments of the play, insists that he take his rightful place as the main speaker at the school's close-of-term event. The gift, then, doesn't exactly save Andrew—but it certainly awakens something within him that, in allowing for greater expression of emotion, just might be able to help him achieve his own salvation.

AGE AND CHANGE

Rattigan's play makes effective use of characters' different ages to show the distinct stages in an individual's life and the way in which these ages affect people psychologically. Ultimately, this is a device that serves to heighten the quiet undercurrent of tragedy that pervades the life of Andrew Crocker-Harris: there is a sense in which his chance at life has gone. Though he is not quite at retirement age yet, he is old enough to be experiencing health problems severe enough to force him to leave his job. Yet before he has even left, a new teacher has been hired to replace him and take up his accommodation (provided by the school). Rattigan thus shows that, paradoxically, the only constant in life is change.

Andrew is portrayed as a teacher from a different generation. His strict and stern manner perplexes his pupils; they prefer the younger, cooler teachers who make an effort to seem likeable and don't seek to maintain an air of formality. The school is changing, and Andrew is being left behind. At the beginning of the play, Taplow does an impression of Andrew for one of these younger teachers, Frank Hunter, gently mocking Andrew's way of teaching. The fact that this impression is encouraged by one of Andrew's fellow teachers shows how far removed Andrew's methods are from the way in which the newer, younger teachers fulfil their roles.

Around the play's midpoint, the Crocker-Harrises are visited at home by Mr. Gilbert and Mrs. Gilbert, their "successors to this flat." While this represents the school's disrespect for Andrew, it also symbolizes the pace of change in life more generally. Now that Andrew can no longer play his part in school life, it is time for him to move on—and the school can't even wait until he's gone to show the new teacher around. As the Gilberts leave, Mrs. Gilbert makes a remark about changing the interior of the apartment. This emphasizes Andrew's loss of power and status, with changes being planned for his home before he has even vacated it.

Andrew, then, can no longer stay stuck in his ways, avoiding any emotional confrontation with his lot in life. The world around him is changing and leaving him behind. That's why the audience does finally see his true feelings about what's happening—because the atmosphere of change that surrounds

him can no longer be avoided.

Andrew's academic subject, too, is closely linked to ideas of age and change. He is a teacher of Classics, the study of classical antiquity centred on ancient Greece and Rome. When Andrew was young he saw this as a vital subject, but he can now sense the low priority it has amongst the pupils that he teaches. The "deadness" of the world of antiquity, then, mirrors the way in which Andrew is also perceived as "dead." But the whole point of Classics study is to bring them to life once more, to save them from being viewed as old and irrelevant.

Early in the play the audience learns that Taplow, Andrew's student, wants to swap from Classics class to Frank Hunter's science class in the new term. He thinks science sounds like fun, with its explosions and experiments. Classics, as taught by Andrew, has at times taken on a kind of dormant quality, in which even exciting source material (like **The Agamemnon**) is made into a mind-numbing tool for the learning of the ancient Greek language.

But later on Rattigan makes it clear that on some level Andrew *has* managed to bring the Classics to life, for Taplow at least, when the latter gives him a leaving gift of *The Agamemnon* (translated by Robert Browning). This gift awakens Andrew's emotions, putting him momentarily in touch with the man he used to be—that is, connecting his older, withdrawn self with his youthful passion for his subject. Taplow's small gesture, then, creates a link across the ages both of Andrew's life *and* of the contemporary and ancient worlds. Though Andrew subsequently tries to dismiss his tearful reaction to Taplow's gift as the "muscular twitchings of a corpse," the audience now sees his life in full perspective, stretching from youth to retirement.

Andrew, then, is forced to confront his position in life in the context of his age. Rattigan shows the power of such self-confrontations and, moreover, how they resist being resolved into simple conclusions. The play demonstrates the magnitude of such moments, and hints at how vital they are to an individual's life more generally. Crocker-Harris represents a man in a stage of reckoning against a backdrop of constant change. Rattigan thus examines the way people measure their lives against their ages, both their own number in years and the wider "age" in which they live.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE AGAMEMNON

The Agamemnon is a classical Greek tragedy written by Aeschylus that plays a complicated and essential role in *The Browning Version*. Firstly, it serves as a prop: it is the text that Andrew Crocker-Harris has his pupil, John Taplow, work on, laboriously translating its ancient Greek line-by-line into English. But when Taplow excitedly embellishes one of the lines—deliberately adding gore and drama to the original—Aeschylus's play comes to represent the potential excitement, reward, and vitality of classical literature. Taplow's intervention, though outwardly disapproved of by Andrew, causes Andrew to reveal his own passion for the play and to relate how, as a spirited and talented scholar in his youth, he produced a translation that was arguably more beautiful than the original. The book, then, allows Andrew to reconnect with what gave his life meaning in the first place. When Taplow returns to Andrew's flat to give him a leaving gift, it's a second-hand copy of *The Agamemnon* translated by Robert Browning (hence the play's title). Taplow's inscription, a quote from the play executed in perfect Greek, moves Andrew deeply: "God from afar looks graciously upon a gentle master."

There is one other important symbolic function of *The Agamemnon* that stems from the content of the classical Greek play itself. Aeschylus's tragedy relates the murder of Agamemnon by his wife, Clytemnestra, thus mirroring the action of *The Browning Version*: though, of course, no actual murder takes place in Rattigan's play, Millie does seek to kill off any late-blooming chance of happiness that her husband, Andrew, has left. Loosely, then, the couple in *The Browning Version* can be seen as a modern version of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, an expression of the ancient story in the emotionally repressed environment of an English public school.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Nick Hern Books edition of *The Browning Version* published in 2008.

The Browning Version Quotes

TAPLOW: *(Protestingly.)* I'm extremely interested in science, sir.

FRANK: Are you? I'm not. Not at least in the science I have to teach.

TAPLOW: Well, anyway, sir, it's a good deal more exciting than this muck. *(Indicating his book.)*

FRANK: What is this muck?

TAPLOW: Aeschylus, sir. The *Agamemnon*.

FRANK: And your considered view is that the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus is muck, is it?

TAPLOW: Well, no, sir. I don't think the play is muck – exactly. I suppose, in a way, it's rather a good plot, really, a wife murdering her husband and having a lover and all that. I only meant the way it's taught to us – just a lot of Greek words strung together and fifty lines if you get them wrong.

Related Characters: Frank Hunter, John Taplow (speaker), Andrew Crocker-Harris

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 5

Explanation and Analysis

This exchange happens early in the play, when both Frank and Taplow are waiting to speak with Andrew. Taplow has been summoned to the Crocker-Harrises' flat for extra work, having missed a class in the previous week. The quote serves two important functions. Firstly, it demonstrates Frank's casual relationship with the pupils at the school; he is part of a new breed of teachers whose general manner is much more informal and laidback than Andrew's. Secondly, it places *The Agamemnon* at the center of the play, where it will come to serve an important role. Taplow's description of the plot lends the atmosphere a sense of quiet menace that anticipates the bitter relationship between Andrew and his wife Millie. The quote also shows that the Classics have the potential to be engaging and exciting—it largely depends on how they're taught.

TAPLOW: *(Mimicking a very gentle, rather throaty voice)* "My dear Taplow, I have given you exactly what you deserve. No less; and certainly no more." Do you know, sir, I think he may have marked me down, rather than up, for taking extra work. I mean, the man's barely human. *(He breaks off quickly.)* Sorry, sir. Have I gone too far?

Related Characters: John Taplow (speaker), Andrew Crocker-Harris, Frank Hunter

Related Themes:

Page Number: 6

Explanation and Analysis

This quote is also part of Frank and Taplow's interactions as they wait for Andrew. It further demonstrates the informality between Frank and Taplow and gives the audience a greater insight into the way Andrew is viewed by his pupils—as a kind of caricature with a host of stock phrases. This particular phrase that Taplow quotes has important reverberations for the play more generally, and though on one level it seems like a fairly hollow remark, it does seem to ironically sum up Andrew's own situation—he definitely does not receive any more than he deserves. Taplow's impression is not especially mean-spirited, contrary to the way Millie presents it towards the end of the play.

FRANK: Possibly not. He ought never to have become a school master, really. Why did he?

MILLIE: It was his vocation, he said. He was sure he'd make a big success of it, especially when he got his job here first go off. *(Bitterly)* Fine success he's made, hasn't he?

FRANK: You should have stopped him.

MILLIE: How was I to know? He talked about getting a house, then a headmastership.

FRANK: The Crock a headmaster! That's a pretty thought.

MILLIE: Yes, it's funny to think of it now, all right. Still he wasn't always the Crock, you know. He had a bit more gumption once. At least I thought he had. Don't let's talk any more about him – it's too depressing.

FRANK: I'm sorry for him.

MILLIE: *(Indifferently.)* He's not sorry for himself, so why should you be? It's me you should be sorry for.

Related Characters: Millie Crocker-Harris, Frank Hunter

(speaker), Andrew Crocker-Harris

Related Themes:

Page Number: 11

Explanation and Analysis

This quote comes from the first conversation between Frank and Millie, which takes place when she sends Taplow on an extraneous errand. She does this so she can have time alone with Frank, with whom she is having an affair. The familiar tone between the two characters gives the audience a sense of their fleeting intimacy. The quote also demonstrates Millie's entrenched bitterness towards Andrew and the extent to which this is based on perception of him as a failure. Her blasé retelling of what were once her husbands grand ambitions serves to set up an atmosphere of sadness and resignation around Andrew before he has even entered the room.

ANDREW: However diligently I search I can discover no 'bloody' – no 'corpse'– no 'you have slain'. Simply 'husband'–

TAPLOW: Yes, sir. That's right.

ANDREW: Then why do you invent words that simply are not there?

TAPLOW: I thought they sounded better, sir. More exciting. After all she did kill her husband, sir. *(With relish.)* She's just been revealed with his dead body and Cassandra's weltering in gore –

ANDREW: I am delighted at this evidence, Taplow, of your interest in the rather more lurid aspects of dramaturgy, but I feel I must remind you that you are supposed to be construing Greek, not collaborating with Aeschylus.

TAPLOW: *(Greatly daring.)* Yes, but still, sir, translator's licence, sir – I didn't get anything wrong – and after all it *is a* play and not just a bit of Greek construe.

ANDREW: *(Momentarily at a loss.)* I seem to detect a note of end of term in your remarks. I am not denying that *The Agamemnon* is a play. It is perhaps the greatest play ever written –

TAPLOW: *(Quickly.)* I wonder how many people in the form think that?

Related Characters: John Taplow (speaker), Andrew Crocker-Harris

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 17

Explanation and Analysis

When Andrew arrives back at the flat, he and Taplow sit down to go through the latter's extra Classics work, in this case consisting of the laborious line-by-line translation of *The Agamemnon*. Andrew's only criterion for the quality of Taplow's work seems to be whether or not his translation is technically correct (as opposed to dramatically effective). Taplow takes the bold move of embellishing the text, inspired by what he is reading (which is surely a significant reason for teaching in the first place). Though Andrew's first reflex is to chastise his student for diverging from the script, Taplow's flash of inspiration wakens Andrew's latent passion for the subject and gets him thinking about it as a play—not just an instructive text.

ANDREW: *(Murmuring gently, not looking at* TAPLOW.*)* When I was a very young man, only two years older than you are now, Taplow, I wrote, for my own pleasure, a translation of *The Agamemnon* – a very free translation – I remember – in rhyming couplets.

TAPLOW: The whole *Agamemnon* – in verse? That must have been hard work, sir.

ANDREW: It was hard work; but I derived great joy from it. The play had so excited and moved me that I wished to communicate, however imperfectly, some of that emotion to others. When I had finished it. I remember, I thought it very beautiful – almost more beautiful than the original.

TAPLOW: Was it ever published, sir?

ANDREW: No. Yesterday I looked for the manuscript while I was packing my papers. I was unable to find it. I fear it is lost – like so many other things. Lost for good.

Related Characters: John Taplow, Andrew Crocker-Harris (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 18

Explanation and Analysis

Taplow's evident interest in Aeschylus' tragedy stirs

Andrew's memories of his youth, reconnecting his older self with his earlier sense of ambition and passion. Andrew was once committed to his subject because of his belief in its beauty, not just as part of his job. It was a source of "joy" and he wanted to use his scholarly talent to share this with others. On the one hand, he has failed to fulfill this early ambition—but Taplow's interest in the subject counts as a quiet triumph. Andrew clearly feels the sense of an end looming over his life, symbolized by his inability to find the manuscript that was the product of his youthful vigor and determination. But the fact that he is now talking about these things is the first sign of a rekindling of his emotional life.

FROBISHER: I've told you about him, I think. He is a very brilliant young man and won exceptionally high honours at Oxford.

ANDREW: So I understand, sir.

FROBISHER: Not, of course, as high as the honours you yourself won there. He didn't, for instance, win the Chancellor's prize for Latin verse or the Gaisford.

ANDREW: He won the Hertford Latin, then?
FROBISHER: No. *(Mildly surprised.)* Did you win that, too?

ANDREW *nods*

FROBISHER: It's sometimes rather hard to remember that you are perhaps the most brilliant classical scholar we have ever had at the school –

ANDREW: You are very kind.

FROBISHER: *(Urbanely corrects his gaffe.)* Hard to remember, I mean – because of your other activities – your brilliant work on the school timetable, for instance, and also for your heroic battle for so long and against such odds with the soul–destroying lower fifth.

Related Characters: Andrew Crocker-Harris, Dr. Frobisher (speaker), Peter Gilbert

Related Themes:

Page Number: 20

Explanation and Analysis

Here, the arrival of Dr. Frobisher, the school headmaster, interrupts Taplow's lesson with Andrew. He has come to have a conversation with Andrew, first checking that the latter is aware of the imminent arrival of Peter Gilbert—Andrew's fresh-faced replacement who will take over the Crocker-Harris apartment. Dr. Frobisher's conversational misstep suggests how far removed Andrew's day-to-day lived experience has become from the prestigious achievements of his early scholarly life. The headmaster tries to correct his mistake, but he can't cover up on the truth he has accidentally revealed: that Andrew's relevance has diminished greatly over the years.

MILLIE: The mean old brutes! My God, what I wouldn't like to say to them! *(Rounding on* ANDREW.*)* And what did you say? Just sat there and made a joke in Latin, I suppose?

ANDREW: There wasn't very much I could say, in Latin or any other language.

MILLIE: Oh, wasn't there? I'd have said it all right. I wouldn't just have sat there twiddling my thumbs and taking it from that old phoney of a headmaster. But then, of course, I'm not a man.

ANDREW *is turning the pages of the Agamemnon, not looking at her.*

What do they expect you to do? Live on my money, I suppose.

ANDREW: There has never been any question of that. I shall be perfectly able to support myself.

MILLIE: Yourself? Doesn't the marriage service say something about the husband supporting his wife? Doesn't it? You ought to know?

Related Characters: Andrew Crocker-Harris, Millie Crocker-Harris (speaker), Dr. Frobisher

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 25

Explanation and Analysis

Dr. Frobisher's visit comes with bad news—that Andrew will not receive a pension from the school. According to the headteacher, the decision was made by the board of governors and hinged on the fact that Andrew is not quite at the usual retirement age yet (though he is close and unwell enough to have resign). Millie shows her deep frustration with Andrew's meekness, though this concern is more motivated by worry about her own financial security than Andrew's wellbeing. Andrew, for his part, is doing what he has become accustomed to: avoiding emotional confrontation. He stares at his book—which it's worth remembering tells the story of a wife's murder of her

husband—in an effort to deny the reality of his situation. In fairness, Millie has a good point: Andrew ought to have put up more of a fight with his superior. However, Andrew's spirit has become so worn down over the years that he barely has any energy left, and his embittered relationship with Millie is at least partly to blame.

ANDREW: They are mostly boys of about fifteen or sixteen. They are not very difficult to handle.

GILBERT: The headmaster said you ruled them with a rod of iron. He called you the Himmler of the lower fifth.

ANDREW: Did he? The Himmler of the lower fifth? I think he exaggerated. I hope he exaggerated. The Himmler of the lower fifth?

GILBERT: *(Puzzled)* He only meant that you kept the most wonderful discipline. I must say I do admire you for that. I couldn't even manage that with eleven–year–olds, so what I'll be like with fifteens and sixteens I shudder to think.

ANDREW. It is not so difficult. They aren't bad boys. Sometimes – a little wild and unfeeling, perhaps – but not bad. The Himmler of the lower fifth? Dear me!

Related Characters: Peter Gilbert, Andrew Crocker-Harris (speaker), Dr. Frobisher

Related Themes:

Page Number: 28

Explanation and Analysis

This exchange comes when Peter Gilbert, a new teacher at the school, comes to look at the flat that he and his new wife will take over from Andrew and Millie in the new term. Andrew tries to be helpful to Peter, offering his advice, but is greatly taken aback when Peter clumsily informs him that Dr. Frobisher compares him to a notorious Nazi general. The nickname also demonstrates the superficiality of the headmaster's charm, showing that he says one thing to people's faces and another behind their backs. Andrew's shock is rooted in the fact that, though he knew he was generally disliked, he did not realize the extent to which he was actively feared. This disconnect between perception and reality is tough to bear, but ultimately forces him to confront his situation rather than continue burying his head in the sand.

GILBERT: *(After a pause.)* I'm afraid I said something that hurt you very much. It's myself you must forgive, sir. Believe me, I'm desperately sorry.

ANDREW: There's no need. You were merely telling me what I should have known for myself. Perhaps I did in my heart, and hadn't the courage to acknowledge it. I knew, of course, that I was not only not liked, but now positively disliked. I had realized, too, that the boys – for many long years now – had ceased to laugh at me. I don't know why they no longer found me a joke. Perhaps it was my illness. No, I don't think it was that. Something deeper than that. Not a sickness of the body, but a sickness of the soul. At all events it didn't take much discernment on my part to realize I had become an utter failure as a schoolmaster. Still, stupidly enough, I hadn't realized that I was also feared. The Himmler of the lower fifth! I suppose that will become my epitaph.

Related Characters: Andrew Crocker-Harris, Peter Gilbert (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 29

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Gilbert awkwardly tries to atone for informing Andrew about his "Himmler" nickname. Of course, the damage is already done and Andrew, despite his attempt to deflect any attention to his emotional life, shows that he is hurt deeply by the comment. His description of his "sickness of the soul" is part of trope running throughout the play in which Andrew is implied to be already "dead." That is, his failure is so entrenched that life is as good as over. However, Andrew's earlier interaction with Taplow—and the interaction to come—create a space for a gentle revival of his spirits. For the time being though, he is forced to confront the painful possibility that his post-career reputation will be "the Himmler of the lower fifth"—and even that will be forgotten soon enough.

GILBERT: *(Brusquely.)* Darling. The Crocker–Harrises, I'm sure, have far more important things to do than to listen to your detailed but inaccurate account of our very sordid little encounter. Why not just say I married you for your money and leave it at that? Come on, we must go.

MRS. GILBERT: *(To* MILLIE.*)* Isn't he awful to me?

MILLIE: Men have no souls, my dear. My husband is just as bad.

Related Characters: Millie Crocker-Harris, Mrs. Gilbert,

Peter Gilbert (speaker), Andrew Crocker-Harris

Related Themes:

Page Number: 30

Explanation and Analysis

This exchange comes just as Peter Gilbert and his wife go to leave the Crocker-Harris flat. Mrs. Gilbert has been looking around the property with Millie, already imagining what she will do with the space when it becomes hers. Her exchange with her husband is relatively light-hearted, and though Millie's comment seems to match their tone, it's uttered with a genuine bitterness directed at Andrew. It chimes with Andrew's earlier description of himself to Gilbert as having a "sickness of the soul." The visit of the Gilberts more generally represents a kind of "changing of the guard"—out with the old and in with the new. This makes it all the more difficult for Andrew to continue avoid any emotional confrontation, be that with himself or with those around him.

TAPLOW: I didn't have a chance with the head here. I rather dashed out, I'm afraid. I thought I'd just come back and – and wish you luck, sir.

ANDREW: Thank you, Taplow. That's good of you.
TAPLOW: I – er – thought this might interest you, sir. *(He quickly thrusts a small book into* ANDREW'S *hand.)*

ANDREW: What is it?

TAPLOW: Verse translation of the *Agamemnon*, sir. The Browning version. It's not much good. I've been reading it in the Chapel gardens.

ANDREW *very deliberately turns over the pages of the book.*

ANDREW: Very interesting, Taplow. *(He seems to have a little difficulty in speaking. He clears his throat and then goes on in his level, gentle voice.)* I know the translation, of course. It has its faults, I agree, but I think you will enjoy it more when you get used to the metre he employs.

He hands it to TAPLOW *who brusquely thrusts it back to him.*

TAPLOW: It's for you, sir.

ANDREW: For me?

TAPLOW: Yes, sir. I've written in it.

Related Characters: Andrew Crocker-Harris, John Taplow (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 32

Explanation and Analysis

This exchange comes when Taplow unexpectedly returns to Andrew's flat, having been dismissed when the headmaster arrived earlier. Given that it's the last day of term, Andrew is highly surprised to see one of his pupils going out of their way to show him a gesture of respect. In fact, a leaving gift from Taplow is so outside of Andrew's realm of possibility that he thinks the book belongs to Taplow. The gift is Robert Browning's translation of *The Agamemnon*, giving Rattigan's play its title.

Andrew shows the physical signs of an attempt to suppress the emotions. By this point, however, the psychological pressure mounting on Andrew has become too much to stop him being deeply moved by Taplow's kind and considered act.

ANDREW: [...] "God from afar looks graciously upon a gentle master."

Related Characters: Andrew Crocker-Harris (speaker), Frank Hunter, John Taplow

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 34

Explanation and Analysis

With Frank back in the room, Andrew translates Taplow's inscription written in the fly-leaf of Taplow's gift. The quote is from *The Agamemnon* itself, showing Taplow's engagement with the text. Moreover, it is written in perfect Greek, showing that Taplow represents a small success in Andrew's teaching. The quote moves Andrew deeply in part because he is an especially fragile emotional state, brought on by his attempt to hold all feelings at bay. But most importantly Taplow's chosen quote shows a remarkable sensitivity towards Andrew's life, suggesting that Taplow empathizes with Andrew and wishes to show that he believes his teacher to be deserving of respect. The quote thus offers Andrew a subtle but powerfully redemptive

perspective on his life.

Pause. MILLIE *laughs suddenly.*

MILLIE: The artful little beast –

FRANK: *(Urgently.)* Millie –

ANDREW: Artful? Why artful?

MILLIE *looks at* FRANK *who is staring meaningly at her.*

Why artful, Millie?

MILLIE *laughs again, quite lightly, and turns from* FRANK *to* ANDREW.

MILLIE: My dear, because I came into this room this afternoon to find him giving an imitation of you to Frank here. Obviously he was scared stiff I was going to tell you, and you'd ditch his remove or something. I don't blame him for trying a few bobs' worth of appeasement.

Related Characters: Andrew Crocker-Harris, Frank Hunter, Millie Crocker-Harris (speaker), John Taplow

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 35

Explanation and Analysis

After Taplow has said his goodbyes to Andrew, Millie comes back into the room. Frank tells her about Taplow's gift. Not wishing her husband even a fleeting moment's happiness, Millie gleefully undermines Taplow's intentions in an attempt to restore Andrew's bleak outlook on life. Taplow's gift represents the one great act of kindness Andrew receives in his final days at the school—not even the headmaster treats Andrew well—and accordingly to undermine Taplow's act is to deny Andrew any momentary redemption from the feeling that his life is one great failure. The added information about Taplow's impersonation, though true, is a further contribution to her attempt to push Andrew back into his quiet doom. Frank, for his part, tries to stop her with his looks—but she can't resist denying Andrew the happiness she feels he has prevented her from having.

FRANK: *(With a note of real repulsion in his voice.)* Millie! My God! How could you?

MILLIE: Well, why not? Why should he be allowed his comforting little illusions? I'm not.

Related Characters: Millie Crocker-Harris, Frank Hunter (speaker), Andrew Crocker-Harris

Related Themes:

Page Number: 36

Explanation and Analysis

With the play nearing its conclusion, Frank is genuinely shocked at Millie's cruel treatment of Andrew. Given that he is having an affair and thereby committing his own wrong against Andrew, his sense of disgust towards Millie shows how clearly deliberate she is in her efforts to hurt Andrew's feelings. Millie's attitude is deeply cynical and the product of years of growing resentment between her and her husband. Their marriage has come to exist as one "little illusion"—albeit not a comforting one—and she feels that she has to prevent Andrew from gaining any potentially uplifting perspective on life. Such a perspective would represent an advantage of his over her, in what has become a depressing war of attrition.

ANDREW: You see, my dear Hunter, she is really quite as much to be pitied as I. We are both of us interesting subjects for your microscope. Both of us needing from the other something that would make life supportable for us, and neither of us able to give it. Two kinds of love. Hers and mine. Worlds apart, as I know now, though when I married her I didn't think they were incompatible. In those days I hadn't thought that her kind of love – the love she requires and which I was unable to give her – was so important that its absence would drive out the other kind of love – the kind of love that I require and which I thought, in my folly, was by far the greater part of love. I may have been, you see, Hunter, a brilliant classical scholar, but I was woefully ignorant of the facts of life. I know better now, of course. I know that in both of us, the love that we should have borne each other has turned to bitter hatred. That's all the problem is. Not a very unusual one, I venture to think – nor nearly as tragic as you seem to imagine. Merely the problem of an unsatisfied wife and a henpecked husband. You'll find it all over the world. It is usually, I believe, a subject for farce. And now, if you have to leave us, my dear fellow, please don't let me detain you any longer.

Related Characters: Andrew Crocker-Harris (speaker), Millie Crocker-Harris, Frank Hunter

Related Themes:

Page Number: 42

Explanation and Analysis

As the play nears its end, Andrew demonstrates the effect that Taplow's gift has had on him. It has awakened his inner emotional sense and empowered him to talk more openly about how his life has turned out. Of course, he can't be expected to have undergone an instant personality transformation, but this exchange is markedly different from the earlier niceties between him and Frank at the start of the play. Andrew uses a metaphor related to Frank's teaching subject, science, to show that he is willing to look at his life in more detail, instead of trying to ignore it as it passes him by. Andrew doesn't explain what he means by "two kinds of love," but he is willing to take some of the blame for his failed marriage. The final remarks of Andrew's quote here are characteristic of his general attempt to underplay the world of the emotions, likening his wife's affairs to a comedic literary genre.

ANDREW: If you think, by this expression of kindness, Hunter, that you can get me to repeat the shameful exhibition of emotion I made to Taplow a moment ago, I must tell you that you have no chance. My hysteria over that book just now was no more than a sort of reflex action of the spirit. The muscular twitchings of a corpse. It can never happen again.

FRANK: A corpse can be revived.

ANDREW: I don't believe in miracles.

FRANK: Don't you? Funnily enough, as a scientist, I do.

ANDREW: Your faith would be touching, if I were capable of being touched by it.

Related Characters: Andrew Crocker-Harris, Frank Hunter (speaker), John Taplow

Related Themes:

Page Number: 43

Explanation and Analysis

By the end of the play, Frank's sympathies are firmly with Andrew, having fully rejected Millie and her cruelty. Sensing the possibility of redemption for Andrew shown by the latter's open and unflinching discussion of his own life, Frank wants to convince Andrew that all is not lost—that there is still meaning and value in a life lived with emotion and honesty. Of course, there is an irony at play here in Frank's statement that a corpse can be brought back to life. Though Andrew typically tries to disguise his emotion once more, his admission that Frank's comment *would* be touching suggests that in reality it probably *is* touching.

MILLIE: He's coming to Bradford. He's not going to you.

ANDREW: The likeliest contingency is, that he's not going to either of us. Shall we have dinner?

MILLIE: He's coming to Bradford.

ANDREW: I expect so. Oh, by the way, I'm not. I shall be staying here until I go to Dorset.

MILLIE: *(Indifferently.)* Suit yourself – what makes you think I'll join you there?

ANDREW: I don't.

MILLIE: You needn't expect me.

ANDREW: I don't think either of us has the right to expect anything further from the other.

Related Characters: Millie Crocker-Harris, Andrew Crocker-Harris (speaker), Frank Hunter

Related Themes:

Page Number: 44-45

Explanation and Analysis

These lines contain Andrew and Millie's final exchange in the play and, in all likelihood, reveal the end of their marriage. The bitter married couple find themselves in the odd situation of discussing which one of them Frank will decide to visit in the coming months (Frank himself insists it will be Andrew and that his relationship with Millie is over). Andrew's final comment to Millie is stark and unflinching, but ultimately indicative of his newfound—or perhaps reawakened—ability to deal with life honestly. The sentiment rings true: the audience can see that this marriage is past the point of saving and, that neither individual can expect anything from the other any longer.

ANDREW: Oh, by the way, headmaster. I have changed my mind about the prize–giving ceremony. I intend to speak after, instead of before, Fletcher, as is my privilege . . . Yes, I quite understand, but I am now seeing the matter in a different light . . . I know, but I am of opinion that occasionally an anti–climax can be surprisingly effective. Goodbye.

(He rings off and goes and sits at table.)

Come along, my dear. We mustn't let our dinner get cold.

Related Characters: Andrew Crocker-Harris (speaker), Dr. Frobisher

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 45

Explanation and Analysis

These are the final words of the play and represent a quiet triumph for Andrew. Whereas earlier he had meekly accepted Dr. Frobisher's desire to switch the order of speakers at the school assembly, swapping Andrew out of the headline slot in favor of a more popular teacher, Andrew now decides to insist on what he knows is rightfully his. Though subtly drawn, this attitude is markedly different from his earlier reluctance to speak up for himself. Though readers can't hear Dr. Frobisher's end of the conversation, Andrew's repeated insistences on speaking last show that the headteacher evidently tries to persuade Andrew otherwise. Andrew's comment on the effectiveness of "anticlimaxes" has poignant implications for his own life, suggesting that even if the excitement of youth is long over and his possibilities have narrowed over the years there is still a hope for him to live in an emotionally sensitive way that is "surprisingly effective."

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

THE BROWNING VERSION

It's around six p.m. on a July evening at a public school in the South of England. As the curtain goes up, the audience sees a fairly large, gloomy flat, in which live Andrew Crocker-Harris, a schoolmaster who is having to give up his job due to poor health, and his younger wife, Millie Crocker-Harris. The interior décor is "chintzy and "genteel cheerfulness." At this point, nobody is in.

The entire play takes place in this room, adding to the sense of psychological pressure on Andrew as he faces the end of his career. The "chintzy" décor is probably Millie's doing, and hints at her superficial civility when dealing with anyone but Andrew—whom she treats with contempt.

The door opens and John Taplow, a sixteen-year-old pupil of fairly plain appearance, enters the room, calling for his Classics teacher, Andrew Crocker-Harris. Hearing no response, he goes over to a small box of chocolates and eats one secretively.

Rattigan uses Taplow's cheeky theft of the chocolate to suggest that he is capable of deception, thereby leaving open the slight possibility that his later act of kindness for Andrew is insincere. Taplow has been called in on the last day of time for extra work, demonstrating Andrew's strictness as a teacher.

Taplow picks up a walking stick and swings it like a golf club. At this moment, Frank Hunter, one of the younger and more popular teachers at the school, comes in and instructs Taplow on how to improve his swing.

Frank represents the new breed of teachers that are a stark contrast with Andrew's disciplinarian manner. These teachers have a more informal and laidback tone with the pupils. Playing golf is what Taplow would be doing if it wasn't for this extra work.

Frank asks Taplow his name. The boy explains that he is hoping to move to Hunter's science class next term. Taplow will find out tomorrow, he says, when the end-of-term results are announced. Though most teachers have already informed pupils of their results, he goes on, Mr. Crocker-Harris is insisting on strict protocol and won't tell him until tomorrow. Taplow explains that he is extremely interested in science.

Taplow's "remove" to Frank's science class depends on Andrew's approval. Taplow probably likes the idea of science because it suggest explosions and excitement—quite a contrast from Andrew's dull Classics lessons.

Frank notices that Taplow is carrying a book, which Taplow refers to as "muck"; Frank asks, "what is this muck?" Taplow explains that it is **The Agamemnon** by Aeschylus, but that it's not exactly "muck"—the plot, which centers on a wife murdering her husband and having another lover, is actually "rather good." Taplow complains, though, that the way Mr. Crocker-Harris teaches sucks the excitement out of it.

Frank uses the pejorative "muck" to maintain his air of informality. Taplow, though, is more interested in the play than other pupils. Taplow's point is fair: Aeschylus' tragedy is an exciting and violent tale, the kind of thing young boys would feasibly take an interest in. There is a suggestion, then, that Andrew has lost his passion for the subject. The specific plot of The Agamemnon *also foreshadows Millie's callous treatment of Andrew.*

Frank asks why Taplow is in Mr. Crocker-Harris's apartment on the last day of school. Taplow has extra work, he explains, because he missed a day the previous week with flu. He'd rather be playing golf, he adds. Frank reasons that at least Taplow will be likely to get his "remove" to his preferred science class from Mr. Crocker-Harris for doing extra work. Taplow thinks that with any other teacher this would be the case; with "the Crock"—Mr. Crocker-Harris —he's not so sure.

Students at the school have nicknamed Andrew "the Crock." The connotations of the name imply on the one hand his fearsome discipline and on the other the sense that he is old-fashioned (by being likened to a leathery-skinned crocodile). Taplow's comments also mark Andrew as an outsider at the school, different from the other teachers.

Taplow tells Frank that he'd asked Mr. Crocker-Harris yesterday whether he had got his "remove." Taplow then impersonates his teacher's response, saying in a "very gentle, rather throaty voice": "My dear Taplow, I have given you exactly what you deserve. No less; and certainly no more."

This passage provides further demonstration of the informality of the interaction between Taplow and Frank, as the student is willing to impersonate one of the other teachers. Taplow's impersonation, though, is not especially malicious. The phrase itself also applies to Andrew's life—he has certainly received "no more" than he deserved.

Frank opens a newspaper and asks Taplow to do the impression again; Frank snorts, and then looks suddenly stern. Frank instructs Taplow to get on with his Aeschylus while they both wait for Mr. Crocker-Harris. Frank says that, as Mr. Crocker-Harris is ten minutes late for Taplow, perhaps the latter should "cut" and go and play golf. Taplow says he'd be far too scared of the consequences to do that; Frank expresses admiration for the intimidating "effect" that Mr. Crocker-Harris has on his pupils.

Frank's pally relationship with his students comes at a price: the loss of discipline. This is not the last time he expresses regret for the personality he puts on for his pupils.

Frank asks Taplow why the schoolboys are so scared of Mr. Crocker-Harris: "what does he do—beat you all or something?" Taplow explains that Mr. Crocker-Harris is not a "sadist," like some of the other teachers, but is all the more fearsome because he doesn't show any feelings: "He's all shriveled up inside like a nut and he seems to hate people to like him." Taplow says he doesn't know any teacher other than him who "doesn't like being liked."

Taplow's analysis of Andrew's personality is impressively accurate, showing that he has a rare sensitivity for his age. It would be easier to understand Andrew, implies Taplow, if he was a sadist. Instead, Taplow senses the sadness and repression lurking within his Classics teacher. Andrew's strategy of avoiding being liked is his way of preventing situations in which he might have to express the way he is feeling.

Taplow confesses that he can't help liking Mr. Crocker-Harris, "in spite of everything." He relates a story to Frank from one his recent Classics lessons. Mr. Crocker-Harris had made a joke in a classical language, and, none of the boys having understood, nobody had laughed. Taplow had laughed, knowing the joke was *meant* to be funny, even though he didn't understand it either—"out of ordinary common politeness, and feeling a bit sorry for him having made a dud joke."

Rattigan adds further evidence to the notion that Taplow is a sensitive and perceptive young man, which will prove to be important information later on in the play when the audience has to interpret Taplow's motives in giving Andrew a gift. This adds to the sense of Andrew's isolation, confirming that the classroom is a lonely place for him.

Resuming his impression of Mr. Crocker-Harris, Taplow goes on to explain that his teacher had asked him to be "good enough" to explain the joke to the rest of the class "so that they too can share your pleasure." Just at this moment, Millie Crocker-Harris, Andrew Crocker-Harris' wife, enters the room; it takes a few seconds for Taplow and Frank to notice her.

Taplow's story shows Andrew's resistance to being liked, not willing to let his student's evidently polite gesture go unpunished. Millie witnessing Taplow's impression gives her ammunition with which to attack Andrew later on.

Frank and Millie greet each other. As the latter goes to put down some parcels and take off her hat, Taplow worriedly asks Frank if he thinks she heard his impression of Mr. Crocker-Harris. Frank nods. Millie comes back in and asks Taplow to take Mr. Crocker-Harris's prescription to the chemist to be made up. She also gives him some small change to get an ice cream. Leaving the room, Taplow asks Frank in a whisper to ensure Millie doesn't tell Andrew about his impression.

Taplow is clearly worried about the consequences of Andrew finding out about his impression. In part it would jeopardize his switch to Frank's science class, but it's likely he is worried about hurting his teacher's feelings too. Meanwhile, Millie sends Taplow on the unnecessary errand so that she can be alone with Frank.

Millie asks Frank for a cigarette and inquires whether he will be staying for dinner. She wonders why he hasn't been to see her this week; he says he's been too busy and that he will stay with her soon in Bradford. Millie complains that Bradford won't be for another month yet, as Andrew doesn't start his new job until September.

The audience starts to learn that Millie and Frank's relationship is closer than might be expected. Frank's excuses for not seeing her demonstrate that their feelings for one another are imbalanced.

Frank explains that he had planned to be with his family in September. Millie wants him to come in August if he can't in September, but he objects that Andrew will still be there, before deciding he should be able to manage September. She complains that that means she won't see him for six weeks; he says she'll "survive that, all right."

These lines provide further evidence that Frank's feelings for Millie do not run very deep. This wrangling over where Frank will be later in the year plays an important role at the end of the play.

Millie approaches Frank, who kisses her swiftly and nervously. He says he's worried about the screen door, because "you can't see people coming in." She asks what he and Taplow had been up to before she came in—"making fun of my husband?"

Millie is younger than Andrew and is attracted to Frank's relative youthfulness too. That she is willing to kiss Frank when Andrew is due to return at any minute shows how distant she has grown from her husband.

Millie says it was "very naughty" of Frank to encourage Taplow's impression. He agrees, and complains that, having only been at the school for three years, he has "slipped" into an informal "act" with the schoolboys that he "just can't get out of." He wonders why it seems that teachers have to either be like him or use "the sort of petty, soulless tyranny" employed by Andrew.

Millie's phrase is clearly flirtatious; she doesn't really care about Taplow's impression. Frank once again complains about his lack of authority with his pupils. His description of Andrew shows that, at this point, he is not especially sympathetic for his fellow teacher. The trope of "soullessness" or "death" crops up throughout the play to describe Andrew and lend an atmosphere of finality.

Frank asks Millie why Andrew decided to become a schoolmaster in the first place. According to Millie, Andrew had thought it was his "vocation" and that he would "make a big success of it." She sarcastically calls his career a "fine success." Frank says she should have tried to stop him, but she responds that she wasn't to know. She tells him not to feel sorry for Andrew—"He's not sorry for himself, so why should you be? It's me you should be sorry for."

Here, the audience gets a first sense of Andrew's early promise and subsequent failure to realize his ambitions. Millie is clearly beyond the point of caring about Andrew's failures, trying to justify her lack of sympathy by referencing Andrew's own seeming indifference—which might well be a defense strategy preventing him from acknowledging how his life has panned out.

Frank and Millie kiss again, with Frank still appearing reluctant. Millie explains what she's been doing all day: saying her goodbyes to the other school-master's wives. She chastises Frank for taking up another wife's invitation to a cricket match when she had invited him herself. She says she knows he's not in love with her, but asks if he does not "realize what torture you inflict on someone who loves you when you do a thing like that?" She says that if Frank doesn't come to Bradford she thinks she'll "kill herself."

Millie's question to Frank his highly ironic, given her treatment of Andrew. Her mention of suicide is not a genuine threat, but more an effort to load psychological pressure on Frank to commit himself to their affair.

Andrew Crocker-Harris enters, dressed in a suit and looking generally "neat" and "unruffled." Frank and Millie quickly compose themselves. Andrew asks whether Taplow is around. Millie explains that she sent Taplow to the chemist for Andrew's prescription. He says there was no need to do that; she could have just called the chemist and had them bring it round.

Here the audience gathers that Taplow's errand was just a trick by Millie in order to have time alone with Frank. Meanwhile, Andrew's "neat" and "unruffled" demeanor projects the image that he would like for himself: calm and self-possessed.

As Andrew steps deeper into the room he notices Frank and greets him. Andrew says that he and Millie had expected Frank at the cricket match; Frank apologizes profusely. Andrew asks Frank if he would like to see the timetable for next term.

Andrew and Frank exchange niceties, which is something characters do a lot throughout the play. This is in part a reflection of the atmosphere in English public schools at the time: civil and performative.

Andrew unfurls the timetable, which is a long roll of paper "entirely covered in meticulous writing." Frank is evidently impressed; Millie says it "bores her to death." Frank doesn't know what the school will do with Andrew, to which the latter replies "they'll find somebody else, I expect."

The timetable shows Andrew's fastidiousness and commitment to high standards. Millie's remark is in keeping with her generally dismissive attitude towards her husband. Andrew's comment is both an attempt to deflect any conversation with Frank in which he might have to express his feelings about leaving the school but is also a frank expression of the truth.

Frank asks about the new job Andrew will go to; Andrew explains that it is a "crammer's" for "backwards boys"—the work will be less arduous, and his doctor thinks it will be much better for his health. Frank offers his sympathies but Andrew says, "there is nothing whatever to be sorry for."

Though Andrew is not strictly retiring, his career is de facto coming to an end. This new school is of no particular merit, and his employment there underlines that he has not followed through on the ambitions he had as a young man.

Taplow comes back to the flat, looking out of breath. He hands Andrew's medicine to Millie. Andrew apologizes to Taplow for being late. Millie exits to the kitchen to start preparing dinner. Frank also goes to leave, in order to leave Taplow and Andrew alone. As he exits, Andrew explains that Taplow has asked to be transferred to Frank's science class—and that "he has obtained exactly what he deserves. No less; and certainly no more." Taplow contains an explosive laugh. Frank leaves.

Andrew repeats the exact phrase that Taplow had used during his earlier impersonation. This demonstrates that Taplow does have a point about Andrew. He is stuck in his ways, evidenced here by his apparent use of his own stock phrase." The phrase takes on the quality of a philosophical aphorism, hinting at Andrew's generally meek attitude to life.

Andrew sits down at the table and invites Taplow to do the same. They both open up texts of **The Agamemnon**, and Andrew instructs Taplow to begin translating the ancient Greek. As Taplow does so, Andrew makes frequent interjections to correct Taplow's mistakes.

The audience gets a sense of what Andrew's classes are like: dull, formulaic and procedural. There is no sense here of Andrew's passion for the subject; however, he does show a principled commitment to getting things right.

Taplow continues, and with "a sudden rush of inspiration" reads out "the bloody corpse of the husband you have slain." The line in question deals with the moment Clytemnestra, Agamemnon's wife, makes a speech over the body of her husband, who she has just killed.

Taplow senses the latent emotion in the text, and how a theatrical performance would seek to draw that out. In essence, Taplow hints at one of the professed purposes of the study Classics: to rescue those texts from the "dead" world and antiquity and breathe new life into them, based on the vitality that was always there.

Andrew asks Taplow where he has read the words "bloody," "corpse," and "you have slain"—they are evidently not in the text itself. Taplow explains that he invented them to make it sound more exciting: "after all she did kill her husband, sir." Andrew tells Taplow that they are meant to be practicing Greek, not "collaborating with Aeschylus."

The particular details Taplow invents aim to heighten the sense of violence and tragedy in the text. He's got a point: Aeschylus is showing his audience a murder. Surely, thinks Taplow, this is therefore a dramatic moment. The point implied is that Classics study should be a kind of collaboration with the source material, not just a repetitive task that the student either gets "right" or "wrong."

Taplow, knowing he is being "greatly daring," continues to object that his interpretation is valid as "it *is* a play," and he has "translator's license." Andrew thinks Taplow is behaving this way because it's the end of term but admits that **The Agamemnon** is "perhaps the greatest play ever written." Taplow wonders "how many people in the form think that," instantly frightened of what he has said. He apologizes to Andrew and asks if he should continue.

It's important to stress how bold Taplow is being here, especially given his earlier description of Andrew's intimidating and authoritarian teaching style. But the gamble pays off, awakening Andrew's own dormant passions for the play. This is an important, if subtle, change in Andrew. Andrew's method with the text usually mirrors his own emotional repression, but here Taplow has touched a nerve.

Andrew stares at the book, motionless. He slowly raises his head and, not making eye contact with Taplow, begins talking about when he was a young man. Back then, he had attempted—"for my own pleasure"—his own translation of **The Agamemnon**, "a very free translation" in rhyming couplets. Taplow asks whether it was hard work; Andrew replies that it was but, that he "derived great joy from it." The play had moved him so much that he had wanted to communicate some of that emotion to others. When he finished the translation, says Andrew, he "thought it very beautiful—almost more beautiful than the original."

The audience gets a detailed glimpse into who Andrew used to be: an impassioned scholar with grand ambitions and a principled desire to share his joy and knowledge. The audience thus has to reconcile this information with who Andrew is now. He explicitly links his decision to become a teacher with his desire to share an emotion; in fact, Rattigan shows that Andrew's younger self essentially had the same reaction to the text that Taplow is having now.

Taplow asks "was it ever published, sir?" Andrew explains that he had looked for the manuscript yesterday while packing his papers but couldn't find it. "I fear it is lost," he says, "like so many other things. Lost for good." Andrew asks Taplow to continue from the previous line.

It's interesting to note that Andrew was already looking for his own translation, hinting that the passion and ambition that it represents might already be on his mind.

Millie comes in, wearing an apron. She informs Andrew that the headmaster, Dr. Frobisher, is about to arrive. Taplow gets up, thinking that he ought to leave. The headmaster comes in and greets Andrew warmly; he excuses Taplow, who "dashes to the door."

Andrew thinks is the last he will see of Taplow, making the boy's reappearance later all the more dramatic and impactful.

Dr. Frobisher asks Andrew if the Gilberts have called to the flat yet. Andrew does not know who they are but is quickly informed by Dr. Frobisher that Peter Gilbert is Andrew's successor and is coming with his wife, Mrs. Gilbert, to look over the flat, which they will take over in the new term.

This passage reveals that Andrew does not have his own home. The flat he and his wife live in his provided by the school and is on the school grounds, emphasizing how closely his career is tied with who he is a person. Life moves on quickly, though, and his replacement is already on the way.

Dr. Frobisher outlines Peter Gilbert's distinguished academic achievements at Oxford University, but says they aren't as high as the honors Andrew attained. He says, "it's sometimes hard to remember that you are perhaps the most brilliant classical scholar we have ever had at the school." Realizing that could come across badly, he explains that it's "hard to remember" because of all the other "brilliant work" Andrew does, like the school timetable.

The audience gets a better sense here of how rare Andrew's academic talent was as a young man—he achieved prestigious honors at the country's most prestigious university. Dr. Frobisher's comment that it's hard to remember is meant harmlessly but actually speaks volumes about the way in which Andrew's career has failed to capitalize on that early promise.

Changing the subject, Dr. Frobisher informs Andrew that he has two "delicate matters" to discuss. The headmaster expresses how "unlucky" it is that Andrew's health is forcing him to retire at "comparatively early an age and so short a time before you would have been eligible for a pension."

This is quite catastrophic news for Andrew, meaning that he won't get the security in his old age that his years of service arguably deserve.

Andrew asks whether Dr. Frobisher's comment confirms he will not receive any pension from the school. Dr. Frobisher says yes, but that it was the board of governors' decision, not his. They couldn't make an exception for Andrew, he says. Andrew halfheartedly interjects that they had made an exception in a similar case recently, for a man named Buller. Dr. Frobisher counters that Buller had retired due to an injury sustained while playing against the school, and furthermore had received five hundred signatures from pupils, former pupils, and parents in support of his case.

Dr. Frobisher's comments reveal that the school does not hold Andrew in a particularly high regard, despite his long time there. Dr. Frobisher makes an effort to deflect the blame for the decision elsewhere, but as the head of the school there's certainly more he could do to advocate for Andrew. The case of Buller shows that if Andrew was a more popular figure, he probably would have received his pension. Andrew accepts the news as if it is inevitable, confirming his general attitude of resignation.

Dr. Frobisher says Andrew's case for a pension is just as deserving as Buller's was, but "rules are rules." Andrew acquiesces, saying that he understands. Dr. Frobisher asks after Andrew's personal finances. Andrew informs him that he has "nothing," but that Millie has a meagre allowance paid to her from her father's business in Bradford. He outlines what his new salary will be at his next job. Clearly concerned, Dr. Frobisher reminds Andrew of the existence of the "School Benevolent Fund" for "hardship."

Dr. Frobisher further deflects blame, appealing to Andrew's sense of propriety.Other people in Andrew's situation would fight back against the perceived injustice, but his emotional repression prevents him from doing so.

Andrew says that he does not deny a pension would have been "very welcome," but sees no reason to argue with the governors' decision. He asks Dr. Frobisher for the second "delicate matter." Dr. Frobisher asks Andrew whether he would be willing to speak first at the end-of-term prize-giving ceremony tomorrow, rather than in the final slot that is customary for a teacher of Andrew's seniority.

The second "delicate matter" is another disrespectful slight on Andrew. Dr. Frobisher seems to be banking on Andrew's reticence for conflict in order to get Andrew to agree to his suggestion. The speech should be Andrew's last say on his career and a moment for the school to show its appreciation for his service.

Dr. Frobisher goes on to explain his reasons for wanting to swap the order of speakers: he wants Fletcher, a teacher whose skill at cricket has made him an immensely popular hit with the children, to be the headline speaker. The boys are bound to applaud him greatly and accordingly, believes Dr. Frobisher, this should be the climax of the ceremony. Andrew says: "Naturally, headmaster, I wouldn't wish to provide an anti-climax." The headmaster thanks him for his understanding on both issues.

Like with the pension, popularity takes precedence and disenfranchises Andrew from getting what he arguably deserves. The "anti-climax" refers to Andrew's proposed speech, but also applies to his career and life more generally.

Millie comes in, having smartened up. She exchanges greetings with Dr. Frobisher. He compliments her appearance, asking Andrew if he knows that he has a "very attractive wife." Millie offers him a drink, but the headmaster explains he is too busy and makes his exit. Millie sees him to the door, exchanging further pleasantries.

Millie projects a superficial air of grace and geniality, and so too does the headmaster. Dr. Frobisher's comment on her appearance is awkward for the audience, who know about Millie's affair (and at this point aren't sure if Andrew knows).

With Dr. Frobisher gone, Millie comes back into the room and curtly asks Andrew: "Well? Do we get it?" After a moment's hesitation, Andrew realizes she is asking about the pension and informs her that it has been refused. She reacts angrily; Andrew says it would have been against the rules to give it to him. Getting more furious, she says: "And what did you say? Just sat there and made a joke in Latin, I suppose?" Andrew replies that was nothing he could say in any language.

Millie drops her act and gets straight to the point. She is angry with Andrew for merely accepting his fate and not sticking up for himself—not out of genuine care for him, but for concern over her own future financial security.

Millie asks whether Andrew expects to live on her money; with his eyes fixed firmly on **The Agamemnon** he objects that he will be "perfectly able" to support himself. "Doesn't the marriage service say something about the husband supporting the wife?" she taunts him angrily. He says she is welcome to whatever money he can save—she thanks him for "precisely nothing."

Andrew is only pretending to read the text. It's worth noting again that The Agamemnon *is a story in which a wife kills her husband, and thus provides a kind of quietly violent backdrop to Millie and Andrew's interactions. The audience also gets a sense of the sheer distance and intense bitterness between the two.*

Andrew informs Millie of Dr. Frobisher's other "delicate matter," to have him speak first at tomorrow's ceremony. She is nonplussed and, in fact, already knew; Dr. Frobisher had asked her opinion a week ago. Just at this moment, there is knock on the door. Mr. Gilbert and Mrs. Gilbert enter, both around the age of twenty-two.

This confirms that Millie was only concerned about the first "delicate matter," the pension. The order of speakers in the school assembly doesn't really affect her.

Andrew explains to Millie that Peter Gilbert is his successor, who has come with Mrs. Gilbert to look around the flat ahead of moving in next term. Millie asks how long the Gilberts have been married, which Mrs. Gilbert says is not even three months yet. Millie asks Andrew "sentimentally" if he heard Mrs. Gilbert. Millie takes Mrs. Gilbert to show her around the flat; they exit the room.

The visitors are fresh-faced and only recently married. They have their whole lives ahead of them and thus heighten the sense of finality surrounding Andrew. Millie's question to Andrew seems innocuous on the surface but is actually a skillfully concealed jibe.

Andrew asks Gilbert if he wants to go with the others to see the flat, but Gilbert says he leaves that "sort of thing" to Mrs. Gilbert. He would rather talk to Andrew about the class he is taking over, admitting he is "petrified." Andrew says that the boys are mostly fifteen or sixteen and "not very difficult to handle."

Peter Gilbert is also apparently "petrified" of his current situation, intimidated by Andrew's reputation for strictness and the general awkwardness of the occasion.

Gilbert says that Dr. Frobisher told him that Andrew "ruled them [the pupils] with a rod of iron. He called you the Himmler of the lower fifth." Andrew is taken aback at the comparison to Himmler, hoping that Dr. Frobisher was exaggerating. Sensing Andrew is hurt, Gilbert tries to explain that Dr. Frobisher "only meant you kept the most wonderful discipline." Andrew replies the class are "not bad boys," though perhaps "a little wild and unfeeling;" Andrew finds the "Himmler" comment hard to let go of.

It pains Andrew to think that even his headmaster says one thing to his face and another behind his back. The comparison is extremely hurtful: Himmler was a prominent Nazi and directed the killing of millions of people. Even though he knew wasn't especially liked, Andrew is taken aback by the disparity between the extent to which he thought he was disliked and the fearsome reputation suggested by Dr. Frobisher's analogy.

Gilbert apologizes for being tactless. Andrew explains that from the beginning of his career at the school he realized he "didn't possess the knack of making myself liked." He says Gilbert evidently won't have that problem but warns that too much likeability is "as great a danger as a total lack of it."

Andrew is aware of his inability to make himself widely liked but also implies that likeability is not necessarily a required quality to be an effective teacher. Peter Gilbert is part of the new breed.

Andrew goes on: "For two or three years I tried very hard to communicate to the boys some of my own joy in the great literature in the past." He says he only succeeded one in every thousand attempts, but that "a single success can atone and more than atone for all the failures in the world."

This gives the audience further insight into Andrew's impassioned beginnings. His comment about the rare successes does have the quality of a prepared remark, though that doesn't make it any less true.

Andrew explains that, when he first started teaching, he found that the boys would laugh at him. He was happy to be laughed at, and played up to it, because "you can teach more by laughter than by earnestness." But over the years his pupils stopped laughing. Perhaps it was because of his illness, reasons Andrew, or "something deeper than that"—"not a sickness of the body, but a sickness of the soul." He admits he knew he wasn't liked but hadn't realized he was also feared. He jokes that "The Himmler of the lower fifth" will be his epitaph.

It seems that Andrew found a way of being that was relatively effective for his teaching, but that over the years he has failed to adapt and has stayed stuck in his ways. That has been his sickness—to remove his own joy from teaching through years of repetition. This has then "infected" the way that both he and his classes are received. Still, he is surprised to think he warrants the "Himmler" nickname.

Gilbert is now "deeply embarrassed and rather upset." Andrew apologizes for burdening him and predicts that Gilbert will do well. Millie and Mrs. Gilbert come back in. Mrs. Gilbert remarks to her husband: "Just imagine, Peter. Mr. and Mrs. Crocker-Harris first met each other on a holiday in the Lake District. Isn't that a coincidence!"

While Peter and Andrew's conversation has been quite painful and strained, their wives' talk has remained on the more superficial level. Mrs. Gilbert's remark, rather than summoning a happy memory, feels wince-inducing.

Mrs. Gilbert starts to relate how she and Peter met, but he interrupts her, saying that the Crocker-Harrises probably have more important things to be getting on with. She jokingly turns to Millie and says, "isn't he awful to me?" Millie replies that "men have no souls, my dear. My husband is just as bad." Mr. and Mrs. Gilbert shape to leave, with Peter lingering behind to talk for a final moment with Andrew. Millie goes out with Mrs. Gilbert.

Though the tone of Millie and Mrs. Gilbert's exchange is light, Millie's comment about men is a pointed barb directed at Andrew. She evidently delights in verbally attacking him in front of others, disguising her remarks so that only he can gather their true intent.

Andrew asks Gilbert not to tell anyone about their previous conversation. He says he does not know what came over him and apologizes for the embarrassment. Gilbert wishes him luck and exits.

Andrew tries to restore his cool demeanor and pointlessly asks Gilbert to keep quiet about his rare moment of emotional transparency.

Millie comes back in, praising the good looks of the Gilberts. She says she doesn't know why Gilbert would want to be a schoolmaster but bets that he won't be leaving without a pension. Andrew seems quiet, causing Millie to ask if he's going to have another one of his "attacks." Andrew claims to be "perfectly alright." She leaves, "indifferently" pointing out where he can find his medicine.

Andrew clearly isn't "perfectly alright," trying to hold back the emotion brought on by realizing how out of step his self-perception is with the way others see him. Perhaps, too, this moment hints that this kind of repressed emotion is the root of his health problems.

Left alone, Andrew stares at **The Agamemnon**, pretending to read. Eventually he puts a hand over his eyes. Just then, Taplow knocks at the door and comes in timidly on Andrew's terse invitation.

Andrew's hand gesture probably indicates both an increase in pressure and a desire to un-see what he has already seen—to look away from his life.

Andrew asks Taplow sharply what he has come for. Taplow replies that he just wanted to come back and say goodbye, and that the arrival of Dr. Frobisher had prevented him from doing so earlier. He hands a small book to Andrew, saying "I—er—thought this might interest you, sir."

Taplow's return is evidently unexpected. It shows his care for Andrew, though, of course, he cannot show that too openly. He is clearly nervous to avoid upsetting his teacher. It's worth remembering that it's the last day of term; Taplow could easily be elsewhere doing something more fun.

Taplow explains that the book is Robert Browning's verse translation of **The Agamemnon**: "The Browning Version." He says, "it's not much good" and that he's been reading it in the gardens. Andrew clears his throat, seemingly in difficulty. He tells Taplow that he knows the translation and that, though it has its faults, Taplow will come to enjoy it if he gets used to Browning's meter.

Here the audience learns the meaning behind the play's title. It's a poignant moment not just because of the gesture of gift-giving between pupil and teacher; given their earlier conversation, we know that a "Crocker-Harris version" of The Agamemnon *exists too. Subtly, then, Taplow's gift is his way of saying that he values Andrew's teaching and the passions that made him choose the vocation in the first place. Taplow's gesture is so unexpected for Andrew—he is given to expect cruelty or indifference—that he mistakenly thinks Taplow bought the book for himself.*

Andrew gives the book back to Taplow, who quickly thrusts it back to him. "It's for you, sir," says Taplow. Andrew is surprised; Taplow explains that he has written an inscription in there too. Andrew opens the book to read Taplow's words. He says Taplow shouldn't have spent his "pocket-money this way." Taplow insists that it wasn't much. Andrew wipes his glasses and puts them on again.

Taplow's gesture almost lies outside the realm of possibility for Andrew—especially given he's just learned about being called the "Himmler of the fifth." The wiping of the glasses gently suggests that this moment might help him to see his life more clearly.

Taplow assumes that Andrew already has the Browning version; but Andrew informs him that, though he may have had it once, he doesn't presently. Andrew continues to stare at Taplow's inscription. Taplow asks if he has got one of the accents wrong on the inscription (written in Greek). Lowering the book and shaking with "some intense inner effort," Andrew says the accent is correct. He takes off his spectacles and asks Taplow to go and pour out his medicine for him.

Andrew is clearly shaken, and this is so out of character that Taplow assumes it must be because he got the Greek in the inscription wrong. Andrew can no longer conceal his repressed emotions and they start to show physically. Naturally, this is unexpected and disconcerting for Taplow to witness. Andrew's request for medicine buys him a brief moment alone.

Andrew sits down. As soon as Taplow leaves the room, Andrew breaks down and "sobs uncontrollably." He tries to gather himself, but when Taplow comes back his "emotion is still very apparent." He thanks Taplow for the medicine and gulps it down. Andrew asks Taplow to "forgive this exhibition of weakness."

This is arguably the climax of the play, in which Andrew finally gives into his emotions. His entire career and life to date flash before his eyes and he confronts the magnitude of his situation. Though he has tried to hold back from showing his feeling, his outpouring is so strong that he knows he cannot hide it from Taplow. The audience sees the explicit connection between emotion and weakness that is Andrew's normal way of being.

There is a knock on the garden door. Frank Hunter comes in, apologizing for interrupting; he had thought Andrew and Taplow would have been finished by now. Andrew explains that the lesson is long over, but that Taplow came back "most kindly" to say goodbye. Frank is clearly puzzled by the evident emotion on Andrew's face.

Frank can sense the strange atmosphere in the room but has no possible explanation for Andrew appearing so emotional. This is a truly unprecedented moment.

Andrew tells Frank that he wants him to see the gift Taplow has given him and hands it over. He asks Frank to look at the inscription. Frank says he never learned Greek. Andrew turns to Taplow and says: "Then we'll have to translate it for him, won't we, Taplow?"

Andrew displays evident pride in his gift, particularly in Taplow's inscription. It also gives Andrew a brief moment of superiority over Frank, given that the latter doesn't have the language skills to translate what Taplow has written.

Andrew recites the inscription, which is a quote from **The Agamemnon** itself, first in Greek and then in translation: "God from afar looks graciously upon a gentle master." The quote, Andrew tells Frank, comes from a speech of Agamemnon's to Clytemnestra. Frank calls it "very pleasant and very apt." Andrew agrees that it's "very pleasant," but perhaps not "so very apt." Andrew turns away from Frank and Taplow, evidently about to be overcome with emotion. Frank gestures to Taplow that Taplow should leave. Taplow says goodbye to Andrew, wishing him luck; Andrew says goodbye too, thanking Taplow. Taplow leaves.

Here the audience learn the what moved Andrew so deeply: the transcription. Taplow's choice of words has two implications. Firstly, it's a quote from the book itself, showing that he has engaged with the material and reflecting well on Andrew's teaching. Secondly, and more importantly, the quote is especially well chosen as a perspective from which to view Andrew's life: that, despite his failures, he is a gentle master who deserves respect. Taplow thus offers Andrew a brief redemption and forces him to confront his deepest emotions—with gently empowering consequences.

Andrew recovers himself a little, expressing "what a fool" he's made of himself in front of Taplow and Frank. He says he is not a "very emotional person," but that there was something "so very touching and kindly" about Taplow's action. He looks at the book and calls it a "very delightful thing to have"; Frank agrees.

Andrew tries to restore his earlier emotional distance, but both he and Frank know that something has changed.

Millie comes in and takes a cigarette from Frank. He explains that Andrew has just received a "very nice" present from Taplow. Andrew shows her the book, explaining that Taplow bought it with his own money.

Millie's reappearance reminds the reader that real life will soon come calling for Andrew, and that there is plenty more left for him to confront. The audience still don't know whether Andrew knows of Frank and Millie's affair.

Frank gives the translation for the inscription but gets it slightly wrong. As Andrew gently corrects him, Millie lets out a sudden laugh. She says it's obvious Taplow is being "artful" and has only bought Andrew the gift to secure his place in the science class next term. She also tells Andrew that she walked in on Taplow doing an imitation of him for Frank earlier.

Millie resents Andrew's happiness, and wants to undermine her husband's pride in Andrew's gift and inscription. It's a cold and calculated attempt to put Andrew back in his place and remind him of his failures.

Andrew nods quietly and says only "I see." He puts the book down and walks to the door, telling Millie he is going to his room for a moment. He departs, taking his medicine with him.

Andrew seems to believe Millie's interpretation of the gift and once again needs to be alone—presumably for another outburst of emotion.

As soon as Andrew is out of the room, Frank chastises Millie, evidently repulsed by her cold dismissal of Taplow's gift. She says: "Why should [Andrew] be allowed his comforting little illusions? I'm not." Frank instructs her to go and tell Andrew that what she said was a lie, but she refuses. Frank says that he will go if she doesn't; Millie thinks Andrew won't like Frank's sympathy.

Frank's sympathies definitely lie with Andrew now. Millie's bitter motivations are clear for him to see, and the audience sees how deep her resentment runs. It's up to the audience to decide if Taplow's gift is heartfelt or an "illusion," though the evidence points towards the first interpretation.

Frank goes to leave but comes back in to tell Millie that their relationship is "finished." She tries to laugh it off, telling him he's making a "mountain out of an absurd little molehill." He retorts that "the mountain I'm making in my imagination is so frightening that I'd rather try to forget both it and the repulsive little molehill that gave it birth." He once again affirms that they are over.

Frank did not have strong feelings for Millie before. Now he does, but they are feelings of disgust and disappointment. Millie for her part demonstrates that she fails to understand the severity of the situation and cannot bring herself to show any sympathy for Andrew's position.

As Frank heads to the door, Millie runs to stop him. She doesn't understand his attitude. He tells her to go and look after Andrew, because "he's just been about as badly hurt as a human being can be." Millie scoffs that Andrew can't be hurt: "He's dead." Frank asks why she hates Millie so much; "because he's not a man at all," she replies.

Millie's view of Andrew has eroded so much over the years that she no longer views him as a man at all. Once again the audience is presented with the idea of Andrew being already "dead."

Millie accuses Frank of hypocrisy for suddenly caring about Andrew when Frank has been deceiving Andrew by sleeping with his wife. He says he only deceived Frank twice, at her "urgent invitation." She slaps him, which he says he deserves and more. She begs him for forgiveness. He tells her that he has never loved her and won't be coming to see her in Bradford.

Here the audience gets a more developed sense of Millie and Frank's affair, which has not been a regular or long-going relationship. Frank clearly regrets his actions. Frank "not going to Bradford" is what Millie earlier said she would kill herself over.

Andrew comes back into the room. He hands Millie the bottle of medicine, which she holds up to the light. He says that she should know him well enough by now to know how unlikely it is he would take an overdose. Without saying anything, Millie leaves the room.

It truly would have been out of character for Andrew to take an overdose. Millie doesn't leave the room because of Andrew, but because of Frank's refusal of her. Whereas the play started with an empty stage, now the room is full of emotion.

Frank tells Andrew that he will not be staying for dinner. Andrew pours himself a sherry and offers one to Frank too; Frank refuses but quickly changes his mind. Frank admits to Andrew that Taplow was imitating him earlier and apologizes for encouraging him. But, adds Frank, Taplow also said that "he liked you very much."

Both men realize they need a drink to calm their nerves. Frank tries to restore the dignity and worth of Taplow's gift, now that Millie has done her best to destroy it. Frank also commits to being honest here; he could deny that Taplow did an impression, but he prefers to try and make Andrew and see that Taplow's impression does not necessarily invalidate the sentiment behind the gift.

Frank recounts what Taplow said more precisely: "He said: 'He doesn't seem to like people to like him—but in spite of that, I do—very much.'" So, concludes Frank, the gift was probably not a cunning ploy. Andrew picks up the book and says: "Dear me! What a lot of fuss about a little book—and not a very good little book at that." He drops it back on the table.

Andrew pretends to dismiss the gift as unimportant, attempting to return to the stilted civility of his interactions with Frank earlier in the play. But there's no undoing his display of emotion.

Frank implores Andrew to believe him about Taplow's intentions. Andrew reassures Frank that he is not "particularly concerned" about his *or* Taplow's views. Frank tells him to keep the book—that he may find it means something to him one day. Andrew says it will be "a perpetual reminder" of the time "the Crock blubbed" when presented with a gift by Taplow. Taplow, he says, is probably telling the story to his friends right now.

Frank sense the gravity of the moment: Andrew needs to believe in Taplow's gift to retain any sense of hope and worth in life. Though Andrew continues to profess his indifference, Frank and audience know otherwise. Frank knows that the book will be in important memento in Andrew's life going forwards.

Frank says that if Taplow "ever breathes a word of that story to anyone" he'll "murder him." But, says Frank, Taplow won't—and nor will he. Frank downs his drink and says goodbye. Frank offers Andrew a parting word of advice: "Leave your wife." Andrew asks if that is just so that Frank can "more easily carry on [his] intrigue with [Millie]?"

Now that honesty and emotion are in the air, Frank tries to further help Andrew by giving him his unflinching piece of advice. It's at this moment that Andrew reveals he knew about the affair all along. The fact that he already knew just underscores the that in recent years life has been something that happens to Andrew, rather than something that he actively lives.

Frank is amazed to learn that Andrew already knew about his affair with Millie. It was Millie herself who told him, says Andrew. Frank wonders why Andrew hasn't done something about it: "why have you allowed me inside your home?" Why, he asks, hasn't Andrew told the governors or "knocked" him down? Andrew says that Frank shouldn't flatter himself that he is the first man to have an affair with Millie.

Frank is stunned at Andrew's inaction. The audience learns the further revelation that Frank is far from the first illicit lover that Millie has had, or indeed that Andrew has known about. This again just serves to highlight how apathetic and meek Andrew has become.

Frank calls Millie "evil." Andrew says that isn't a kind word to use about someone, so he hears, that Frank has asked to marry. Frank tells Andrew he hasn't asked her that, nor will he. He says the truth is he did what he did out of "weakness," "ignorance," and "crass stupidity." He says he can't ask Andrew to forgive him, but that truthfully the only emotion Millie ever aroused in him was "disgust"—just moments ago in her treatment of Andrew.

Andrew and Millie's marriage is clearly a show, without a shred of love left in it. Though Millie tells Andrew the truth about her affairs, it seems she also embellishes what she tells him; it seems unlikely that Frank has proposed to her.

Andrew jokingly calls Frank's statement "delightfully chivalrous." Frank again implores Andrew to leave Millie: "she's out to kill you." Andrew says he can't leave her as it would "add another grave wrong" to the one he has already done: "to marry her."

It's worth contrasting Andrew and Frank's exchange with the one early in the play. Since Taplow's gift, Andrew has found the ability to speak frankly and openly about his life, without denying any of the pain that that entails. He also refuses to typecast Millie as evil, taking his share of responsibility in the failure of their marriage.

Andrew goes into further detail about his and Millie's marriage, telling Frank that both he and her are "interesting subjects for your microscope." He explains that they always wanted "two kinds of love," which he had once thought compatible but that had proved otherwise. Though he was "a brilliant classical scholar," he goes on, he "was woefully ignorant of the facts of life." Now the love they should have shown each other has turned to "bitter hatred."

This is a painfully honest speech from Andrew, and he no longer appears to be trying to hide any emotion or thought from view. That's why he mentions the microscope—because he is now unafraid to examine his life in full, miniscule detail. He reviews the arc of his life and admits its failures but shows strength in doing so. The audience never learns exactly what these "two kinds" of love are.

Andrew says his situation is not nearly as "tragic" as Frank seems to imagine: "Merely the problem of an unsatisfied wife and a henpecked husband. You'll find it all over the world. It is usually, I believe, a subject for farce." He tells Frank that he does not wish to "detain" him any longer. When Frank again tries to convince Andrew to leave Millie, Andrew shouts, "will you please go!"

Andrew now tries to underplay the failures of his marriage. He is a complex character, and it would be naïve to think that Taplow's gift could bring about a complete and sudden transformation (though its effect is undoubtedly real). Andrew views his marriage in the context of his failures as an academic scholar and teacher. Having failed to achieve greatness in life, he plays down the tragedy of failing to achieve greatness in love, comparing it to a comedic literary form and showing his disinterest in his wife's disloyalty.

Frank agrees to leave, but first he wants Andrew to say goodbye to him properly. Andrew walks over to him. Frank says he isn't trying to pity Andrew but would like to be of help. Andrew says that, if Frank thinks his kindness will make Andrew "repeat the shameful exhibition of emotion" he made to Taplow he is mistaken. His response to the gift, he says, was "a sort of reflex action of the spirit. The muscular twitching of a corpse."

Andrew again defaults to trying to dismiss the world of the emotions, but it doesn't ring true. The trope of his "deadness" returns. While he may have recently moved through the world like a zombie, his reaction to Taplow provided evidence of a beating heart and a deep sense of feeling.

Frank tells Andrew "a corpse can be revived." Andrew responds that he doesn't "believe in miracles." Frank says that he does. "Your faith would be touching, if I were capable of being touched by it," insists Andrew. Frank puts forward the idea that he could visit Andrew at his new school, which Andrew dismisses. Frank, undeterred, figures out a date to visit Andrew. Frank says "goodbye, until then." After some hesitation, Andrew shakes his hand and bids him farewell.

Interestingly Frank's response is expressly non-scientific. Corpses can't be revived—but perhaps his comment shows the way in which the situation is exerting a strong emotional effect on him too. Andrew's acknowledgement that Frank's faith would *be touching is a tacit suggestion that it actually is. For his part, Frank seems to have undergone a moral turnaround and now seeks to maintain a friendship of sorts with Andrew.*

Frank heads to the door. He tells Andrew that he is "off to have a quick word with Taplow." Frank asks Andrew whether he can tell Taplow if Andrew has approved Taplow's move into the science class. Despite it being "highly irregular" for Frank to give this information to Taplow, Andrew informs him that Taplow's wish has been granted.

Andrew's decision in Taplow's favor suggests that deep down he knows the gift was meant sincerely and that Taplow has shown genuine concern. Andrew informing Frank also represents a small rebellion against school protocol, further demonstrating the profound, if subtle, change in Andrew's character.

Just before he leaves, Frank gets Andrew to tell him what his new address will be. Millie comes in at this moment to set the table for dinner. Hesitatingly, Andrew gives Frank the address (which is in Dorset); Frank promises to write to him in advance of his visit. Frank says goodbye to Andrew and Millie and leaves.

If Andrew really didn't want Frank's potential friendship, he would refrain from giving him the address. Rattigan hints, then, that Andrew is making a small movement towards living a more outgoing, emotionally-connected life.

After a moment's silence, Millie laughs. She says it's funny that Andrew has invited Frank to visit him. Andrew protests that Frank suggested the visit. Millie spitefully retorts that Frank will visit her in Bradford—not Andrew in Dorset. Andrew says the most likely scenario is that he will visit neither of them. Andrew then gives his intention to stay at the school until he leaves for Dorset, rather than himself staying in Bradford over the summer break.

Millie again pours cold water on anyone having good intentions towards Andrew. The particular argument demonstrates just how distant the married couple have become from one another: they are disagreeing over the company of another man. It's hard to say whether Frank will visit either, or if he was just overcome with the emotion of the occasion.

Millie says indifferently that Andrew can do whatever he wants, and asks what makes him think she will join him in Dorset. She tells him not to "expect" her there. He replies that neither of them has the "right to expect anything from the other."

Andrew's response to Millie's comments shows a quiet strength; he is no longer willing to go on playing the role of husband. He rightfully acknowledges that their marriage is beyond saving.

The phone rings, which Andrew picks up—it's the headmaster, Dr. Frobisher. Andrew answers Dr. Frobisher's questions about the timetable, before informing him that he has changed his mind about the prize-giving ceremony—he insists on speaking last, "as is my privilege." Though the headmaster evidently tries to persuade him to change his mind, Andrew is insistent that he now sees "the matter in a different light," and that "occasionally an anti-climax can be surprisingly effective." He puts down the phone and tells Millie that they mustn't let their dinner go cold.

This an important final moment, which is also fittingly anti-climactic. It represents a significant change in Andrew's character, but is so subtle that it could easily be missed. Andrew has decided that he won't put up with the school's disrespect and will insist on taking his rightful place in the order of speakers at the assembly. The ending of the play mirrors Andrew's words, proving "surprisingly effective" by ending on a quiet—but undoubtedly defiant—note.

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