***Name:***

***Sailmaker* by Alan Spence**



***A study of life, loss and change***

Alan Spence’s play *Sailmaker*, about a father and son struggling with poverty, grief and loneliness, is a subtle portrayal of Glasgow working class life across a decade of social change.

1. Play script and Key Dramatic Terms

*Sailmaker* is a play script. It is therefore important as you read this play to imagine yourself watching and listening to the action. It is a drama, not a novel.

A novel is usually arranged in chapters. A play script however is arranged in **SCENES** and **ACTS**. Both serve the purpose of **STRUCTURING** the writing. They separate the action in to manageable chunks for the reader/audience.

However in other ways they are different. In a novel the narrator can quite easily tell the reader that time has passed since the last chapter or describe a new setting. Think about watching a play. There is no-one to tell the audience that time has passed or the action has moved to a new room, town or country. Scenes and Acts allow this to happen.

1. Stage directions

The stage directions are important in helping us to imagine exactly what is going on: they can help is picture each character’s actions and reactions (what they do and how they feel). Throughout the play, the four main characters enter and exit the stage on many occasions. We must read the stage directions carefully to follow how the author does this.

A good example of this is when Alec and Ian are outside playing football and joking around. We know that they leave the stage when we are told in the stage directions that *“Alec chases him offstage”****.*** Immediately in the stage directions, we are told *“Enter Davie and Billy”.*This tells us that Davie and Billy have now entered the stage and they are the only characters on the stage at that time.

Stage directions are usually written in italics.

*What makes a play script different from a novel?*

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*Read the following stage directions. What do we learn about Davie and his state of mind?*

*After he has told Alec the news about his mother’s death, the stage directions state that Davie* ***“Moves back, quietly busies himself, sets fire in the hearth”.*** *After the funeral, the stage directions tell us that Davie* ***“Moves around as he is talking”*** *to Alec.*

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1. Set and Setting

There are two acts in the play and within each act scenes seamlessly move from one to another without any break. The setting of the play alternates between Glasgow tenement flat (room and kitchen) and the surrounding street and back courts.

*Read the following extract from the play.*

*Later on I opened the window and looked out across the back courts. The breeze was warm. Everything was the same. It was very ordinary. Nothing had changed…The sun shone on the grey tenements, on the railings and the middens, on the dustbins and the spilled ashes. It glinted on windows and on bits of broken glass. It was like something I remembered, something from a dream. Across the back, a wee boy was standing, blowing on a mouth-organ, playing the same two notes over and over again.*

*What does this description from Alec’s dialogue early in Act 1 suggest about the setting?*

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1. Props

The word ‘props’ is short for property. It refers to an object used on stage by actors during a performance. A prop is anything that can be moved on a stage. One essential prop introduced early in the play is the yacht.

The yacht is used as effective symbolism throughout the text, representing hope and the possibility of escape from the life of poverty the characters endure. While Billy, Alec and Davie are all admiring the yacht and discussing the ways in which Billy is going to paint it, Billy *remarks ‘It’ll be that real we can aw sail away in it!’.* Davie is taken with this notion of escape, and adds *‘Away tae Never Never Land!’* Here the playwright uses the symbol of the yacht to firmly establish the fantastical element of the characters’ desire to escape their unpleasant setting by referencing a mythical, non-existent destination; suggesting to the audience the unlikelihood of this occurring by the end of the play.

While both the brothers are equally enthused by the idea of escape that the yacht symbolises, their initial reactions when presented with the broken toy- Billy’s enthusiasm compared with Davie’s procrastination- highlight the contrast between them. Spence’s expert characterisation makes Davie’s defeatist attitude clear when he says of repairing the yacht that ‘*it’ll take time. Materials’ll be dear.’* This contrasts powerfully with Billy’s positivity, as he states confidently that he would *‘get it done this week,*’ and does so. Davie’s attitude towards the yacht, which symbolises hope, reflects the hopelessness of his own situation.

The resolution of the play makes the power of the yacht’s symbolism clear to the audience as Davie and Billy react to their circumstances in very different ways; Billy escaping his situation while the yacht, symbol of escape and hope, is burned in Davie’s grate. On discovering the yacht in the Glory Hole Alec goes to burn it, saying that Davie was ‘*always gonnae fix it up for me’* and that he *‘could always imagine it.’* Davie replies that he *‘always meant to.*’ His passive attitude towards the yacht mirrors the passive attitude he has towards bettering his situation; preferring luck and gambling over practicality. As Alec describes the yacht burning, he references the sight of a Viking longboat moving ‘*out to sea in a blaze with the body of a dead chief.’* The destruction of the yacht symbolises the destruction of Davie’s identity and self-worth, and the end of any hope he might have had of renewing his trade and therefore taking control of his life.

*How does Spence suggest the yacht represents hope and escape?*

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*The yacht and what does/does not happen to it helps us to understand more about Davie. Why?*

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*Explain why the yacht is important when examining the relationship between Davie and Alec*

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*Other props appear later. Find another 2 props and comment on their importance in the play.*

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1. Sound

Sound is used to set the scene. For example this includes a few songs from the era that actually relate to the themes of the play, such as ‘Singing the Blues’ early in Act 1.

*What are the connotations of the word ‘Blues’?*

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 *How do the connotations of the song ‘Singing the Blues’ relate to the events of the early stages of the play?*

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*Here are another two songs from the play. Comment on their relevance to the ideas/character.*

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| * 1. *The Sash My Father Wore*

* 1. *My Generation by The Who*
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1. Lighting

Remember that a play is performed in a theatre. Lighting could also make up for a lack of scenery. The lighting helps to set the scene to create a particular atmosphere and to suggest a time of day. It also helps to suggest an interior or exterior setting.



For example on the very first page of the play (page 6), the dramatist uses lighting and stage directions to show that Alec is delivering a soliloquy about how he found out about his mother’s death. The darkness suggests a serious mood. In the stage directions we are told *“Dark. Light on Alec, centre stage”.* This tells us that Alec is about to deliver a soliloquy to the audience. After the soliloquy is finished, the stage directions tell us *“Lights fade up”.* This tells us that the soliloquy has ended.

*What is the impact of the stage direction that6 preceded Davie’s soliloquy in which he recounts the time he was mugged?

(Dark. Light on Davie, forward.)*

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1. Poetic Monologue – Soliloquy

This is a technique that allows the audience to share and appreciate a character’s thoughts and feelings. The character will speak directly to the audience, revealing their own thoughts to us without anyone else in the play being aware of them. This produces something called dramatic irony where the audience knows more than the other characters in the play.

For example early in Act 1 of the play Davie says;

*As long as ye keep movin it doesnae hit ye. Get the fire goin clean the windaes dust the furniture think about somethin for eating don’t stop keep yerself goin. Sometimes for whole minutes ye can nearly nearly forget about it, shove it tae the back ae yer mind. Then maybe yer lookin for somethin and ye turn round tae ask her where it is an ye wonder for a minute where she’s got tae and ye think maybe she’s through in the room an ye catch yerself thinkin it and it hits ye an ye think Christ this is it this is me for the rest ae ma days.*

The soliloquy is effective because Davie, who is notoriously poor at expressing his feelings, is able to reveal to the audience his deep distress over the loss of his wife in a very moving and poignant way.

Or later in Act 2 of the play Alec is able to reveal his thoughts about his motivations for attending the mission:

*Ian thought I was soft in the head for going so much to the Mission. He couldn’t understand. I felt this glow. It was good to feel good. It had come on stronger since my mother had died.*

The soliloquy is effective because we learn that going to the mission is a coping mechanism for Alec who wants a way to feel better about himself since his mother’s death.

In both of these examples, the monologue allows the audience to appreciate inner thoughts and feelings that neither character could reveal in their daily lives through their dialogue.

*Explain what dramatic irony is in your own words.*

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*Refer to another example of a soliloquy from the play and explain why it is effective.*

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1. **The compression of time**

At many points throughout the play, hours, days, weeks, months and years pass in the matter of a few lines or pages. For example, on page 6, Alec tells us of his reaction to the news of his mother’s death. Then, on page 7, without clearly telling us, the author moves the play forward to a few days later when Davie and Alec are tidying up after her funeral.

This technique is called “compression of time” and Alan Spence uses it many times throughout the play.
Another example of this is on page 25. Alec and Ian are playing outside and having a laugh. The stage directions tell us that “*They exit”*and then *“Davie in Chair. Billy enters”*. Then immediately we are in the middle of a conversation taking place between Davie and Billy a few days later.
*Here is another example of “compression of time”.
Highlight and analyse any technique the writer uses to show that time is passing:

ALEC: (Coming forward) First conjugation.
Amos, amas, amat, amamus, amatis, amant.
I love, you love, he she or it loves,*

*We love, you love, they love.*

*Half the class got belted for not bein able to do that.*

*Amare.*

*To love.*

*Wallop.*

*Same in music, for the ones that couldn’t sightread.*

*Every Good Boy Deserves Favour.*

*Or in physics and chemistry if you messed up an*

*experiment.*

*Matter can neither be created nor destroyed.*

*Glasgow made the Clyde, the Clyde made Glasgow.*

*Amazin the things ye remember.*

*Algebra Geometry Trigonometry.*

*What is the square root of minus one?*

*Religious Education, one period a week.*

*The Apostle’s Creed.*

*I believe for every drop of rain that falls, a flower grows.*

*Elementary calculus.*

*The approach to Standard English.*

*Earth hath not anything to show more fair.*

*Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow.*

*Future.*

*Amabo.*

*I will love.*

*Electricity. Magnetic flux.*

*The periodic table of the elements.*

*Analyse. Parse. Conjugate. Decline.*

*Prove. Discuss. Explain. With diagrams.*

*Future Perfect. Nothing to beat it.*

*A good education.*

*Tomorrow and tomorrow.*

*First year, second year, third year bursary.*

*Fourth year ‘O’ grade, fifth year Highers.*

*University here I come.*

*(Pause)*

*Ready or not. (Runs off)*

1. Themes in the play – Religion, Grief and Sectarianism

*For each of the following write down one or two quotations from the play to illustrate the statements.*

Religion is first referred to in an innocent, childlike way when 11-year-old Alec thinks about the death of his mother. He hopes that God has taken his mother safely to heaven and seeks a sign that this is indeed the case. He is pleased when he looks up and the clouds have parted to reveals a section of blue sky.

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This is followed by Alec’s fanatical Mission period which comes to an abrupt conclusion when he is pushed to explain his allegiances and finds he cannot because he does not truly believe in God.

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The darker side of religion features strongly through Billy and Ian revealing the sectarian\* divide that has defined Glasgow for almost a century. Their allegiance to Protestant Scotland and rangers, criticising anything even remotely linked to Catholicism, defines them as stereotypical bigoted Glaswegians, both being products of a sectarian upbringing.

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\*Sectarianism in the Glasgow of the play takes the form of religious and political rivalry between Roman Catholics and Protestants. It is reinforced by the fierce rivalry between Celtic F.C and Ranger F.C, the two Old Firm football clubs.

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1. Themes in the Play - Social Class and Changing Family Relationships

*For each of the following write down one or two quotations from the play to illustrate the statements.*The play is set in a Glasgow tenement flat (room and kitchen) and its surrounding street and back courts which establishes that the family belong to the traditional Scottish working class. It was common for men at this time, like Davie, to leave school at the earliest opportunity and become apprentices to a trade (such as painting and decorating or sail making). We note at the start of the play that Alec is proud of his father’s trade as a sailmaker and sees it as superior to the job he is doing at the start of Act 1 – working as a tick man.

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Davie struggles to recover after his wife’s death and does nothing to improve his employment situation. Despite this he is determined his son will have the opportunities that he did not, encouraging Alec to see the importance of education as the key to success in life.

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For Alec, private education leads to university, opportunities and risks. Moving from working to middle class was not always viewed positively. Ian and Billy do not value education. Ian hates school, cannot wait to leave and cannot understand why Alec is still there and not out working. Ian mocks the private school, insinuating that all the boys there are snobs and homosexuals, and that rugby and cricket are not suitable sports for boys.

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Structurally, it is interesting that the scene revealing Alec's new studies is followed immediately by Davie’s redundancy. At the end of the play the family are in a dire situation and must burn their possessions for warmth however Alec will soon be leaving for university implying that though education will provide him with escape it will also alienate him from his father and his working class roots.

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