

Study Guide for Tennessee Williams' Suddenly Last Summer

Tennessee Williams' "Suddenly Last Summer" is a one-act play that explores the themes of mental illness, sexual repression, and the fragility of human relationships. The play was first produced in 1958 and has since been adapted into a film and an opera.

Characters

* **Violet Venable**: A wealthy widow who is obsessed with her dead son, Sebastian. * **Catherine Holly**: Sebastian's cousin, who claims that he was murdered by his mother. * **Dr. John Cukrowicz**: A psychiatrist who is hired to examine Catherine. * **Sister Felicity**: A nun who is Catherine's guardian.



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Summer by Course Hero

★★★★☆ 4.4 out of 5

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Reading age : 9 - 12 years

Grade level : 4 - 7

Item Weight : 7.2 ounces

Dimensions : 5 x 0.3 x 7.5 inches



Plot

The play opens with Violet Venable visiting Dr. Cukrowicz in his office. She tells him that her son, Sebastian, was murdered by his cousin, Catherine Holly. Violet claims that Catherine is mentally ill and that she needs to be lobotomized.

Dr. Cukrowicz agrees to examine Catherine, and she is brought to his office. Catherine tells Dr. Cukrowicz that she and Sebastian were lovers and that he was killed by his mother. Violet overhears this conversation and is enraged. She tries to attack Catherine, but Dr. Cukrowicz stops her.

Dr. Cukrowicz eventually concludes that Catherine is not mentally ill and that she is telling the truth about Sebastian's death. Violet is arrested for murder, and Catherine is released from the hospital.

Themes

The following are some of the themes that are explored in "Suddenly Last Summer":

* **Mental illness:** Catherine is diagnosed with schizophrenia, but it is unclear whether she is actually mentally ill or if she is simply being manipulated by Violet. Violet herself is shown to be delusional and paranoid, and she is willing to go to great lengths to protect her own interests. * **Sexual repression:** Sebastian and Catherine's relationship is forbidden, and it is this repression that ultimately leads to his death. Violet is a puritanical figure who cannot accept her son's homosexuality, and she sees Catherine as a threat to her own social status. * **The fragility of human relationships:** The relationships between the characters in "Suddenly Last Summer" are all fragile and unstable. Violet and Catherine are both deeply damaged people, and their need for love and acceptance

leads them to make terrible choices. Dr. Cukrowicz is the only character who is able to see through the illusions and deceptions, but even he is unable to save Catherine from her fate.

"Suddenly Last Summer" is a powerful and disturbing play that explores the dark side of human nature. The play is a reminder that mental illness and sexual repression can lead to tragedy, and that even the most loving relationships can be destroyed by deceit and violence.

Study Questions

1. What are the main themes of "Suddenly Last Summer"? 2. How does the play explore the issue of mental illness? 3. What is the relationship between Violet Venable and Catherine Holly? 4. What is the significance of Sebastian's death? 5. How does the play end?



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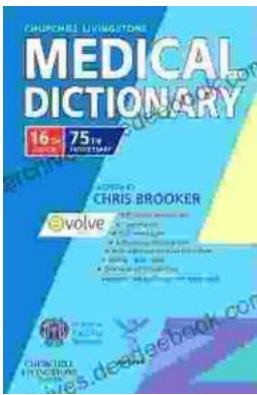
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