

THE LANGUAGE OF DRAMA:
AN ANALYSIS OF GRAHAM GREENE'S THE
COMPLAISANT LOVER

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Abstract

This essay is divided into two parts. The first part defines theatrical language from a theoretical point of view, while the second shows a practical application of the theoretical bases governing such language. The text chosen for this analysis is *The Complaisant Lover* (1959) by Graham Greene.

The essay identifies not only the linguistic structures of dramatic discourse, but also other factors involved in communication, such as the context, setting, social and institutional constructs, power relations, ideology, and the possibility of change. In *The Complaisant Lover* special attention is given to three principles that, according to David Birch in *The Language of Drama* (1991), regulate the discourse strategies of communication, i.e. conflict, control and role. When systems of meaning compete with one another, they give rise to a *conflict* of systems; this shows that language is based on the struggle to impose one system on another, one idea on another, one linguistic classification on another. Every communicative act aims at influencing the thoughts and actions of others, and thus to keep others under *control*. The choices speakers make, both in linguistic terms and in discourse strategies, are determined by social and ideological situations that serve to keep others under control or to be controlled.

Lastly, if we start from the assumption that, in every moment of life we enact an institutionally determined role, it is clear that identity, and hence subjectivity, are not intrinsic to human beings, but are always realized in social and institutional discourse. According to the French linguist Emile Benveniste, "man constructs himself as a subject only through language": when we say 'I' or 'you' we are actually trying to create a discourse in which interaction can take place. Since, however, language is never innocent, the use made of it signals the presence of given ideologies.

PART 1

Questions such as ‘What does the author mean?’ or ‘What does this text mean?’ – where ‘the author’ and ‘this text’ are stable, unchanging, repositories of meanings which determine a single interpretation of the text – have been increasingly challenged and rejected in contemporary critical theory. Roland Barthes in ‘The Death of the Author’ states that “To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing” (Barthes 1968: 212), and, therefore, to close off interpretation. Michel Foucault in ‘What is an Author’ suggests that instead of asking questions like ‘Who is the real author?’ and ‘What has he revealed of his most profound self in his language?’, we would do better to ask questions like ‘What are the modes of existence for this discourse?, Where does it come from?, how is it circulated and who controls it?’ (Foucault 1969: 290).

Not only do these views challenge the idea of meaning as belonging only to the writer, but also as belonging only to a particular semiotic system, namely writing. Meanings differ according to different, though often related, semiotic systems. Therefore, there is not a single meaning, especially in dramatic texts. A dramatic text, which already belongs to two different semiotic systems (writing and writing as speech), once performed, becomes an entirely new discursive formation, a quite different semiotic system requiring a quite different semiotic analysis. No dramatic text is ever completed: it is always meanings in process. Similarly, no matter how detailed the performance processes may be, a production does not complete those processes, it simply creates a new text for a particular time, place and reception.

One of the first moves to break away from the twin tyrannies of the privileged literary text and the privileged author is to recognise that there is not one voice involved in constructing meanings, but multiple voices.

David Birch combines Wittgenstein’s idea that it is “practices [which] give words their meaning”, i.e. that it is use that determines meaning, and not an intrinsic, context-free, meaning encoded into the words, with a Marxist understanding of praxis as human activity which, in the face of institutional oppression and alienation, needs to be a radical activity in order to bring about change in the human condition. According to Birch, this combination “can be a very effective base on which to build a critical practice” (Birch 1991: 19): praxis, and relatedly, language involve social and political interaction and change. A critical understanding of drama praxis, therefore, is also about social interaction and change. Praxis is both “the action and process which establishes what we, as people and social institutions, do, and what we do is determined discursively, i.e., by the various means we have of making meaning, among them the use of language” (*ibid.*).

Meanings are, therefore, triggered by language and are not intrinsic to the system and structure of language. They are made by people and institutions, in social situations which are always changing. What the words themselves stand for are often of less consequence than the discursive strategies and structures involved. Meaning, therefore, should not be restricted simply to the literal content, but to the many levels of meaning involved in language as action, in social and institutional transactions and interactions of people involved in communication.

Language as action may involve strategies of body movement, facial expressions, voice quality, speed of delivery; of social niceties and small talk; of irony, satire, metaphor and paradox; of hesitations, false starts and silences of language. There are “meanings too of ideological, political, philosophical assumptions implicit (or explicit) in interaction; the meanings of classist, racist, colonialist, and sexist oppression; the meanings conveyed in establishing/opposing status and power relationships amongst people; the meaning involved in conflict and co-operation” (Birch 1991: 24). This is particularly evident at a dramatic level because the meanings involved in body movement, facial expressions, etc..., together with an ideological meaning of a dramatic text, play a central role in performance and production.

If language and drama are about communicative acts and discursive formations, I shall deal now with three principles ruling interaction and discursive strategies, namely *conflict*, *control* and *roles*.

1.1. Conflict

One of the first threats implicit in language as communication is the illusion of conversation resulting in an illusion of co-operation. There are very often competing systems of making meaning, all of which are in *conflict*. Recognising those different systems and the resultant conflict means recognising that language is fundamentally based on struggles for privileging specific systems over other systems, specific participants over other participants, specific ideas over other ideas, specific classifications of language over other classifications. Language is therefore a struggle of controlling others and being controlled by others, of constructing realities and of losing control. However, it is also a struggle of articulation and the alienation which that can bring.

Language as a struggle for power amongst multiple meanings leads inevitably to an analysis of the goals which each participant involved in conversation tries to achieve. These goals are conventionally thought to be based on co-operation: over the years a view of language has developed which suggests that we operate according to a number of maxims of co-operation which we try not to break. In reality, participants do not share goals co-

operatively; for the most part they fight to achieve their own goals. This is often signalled by discourse shifts which move from supportive exchanges to challenging ones, because a particular discourse feature has one meaning for one of the participants and a quite different meaning for another. The conflict arises because of disturbed expectations, for both participants, about the goals of the exchange. This disturbance is a normal process of interaction. It is this idea of interacting with someone in order to effect some sort of a change upon them that is of central importance to drama praxis.

Therefore, each character in a dramatic text has different discourse strategies and “we need to be dramaturgically aware of conversational strategies in order to understand roles, relationships and discursive meanings, over and beyond the words that are being used; to understand *conversational implicature*, i.e. the level of meaning in interaction beyond what is actually said *in words*” (Birch 1991: 57). Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson have analysed in detail strategies of conflict and co-operation. They identify co-operation strategies in two main ways: rationality and face. Rationality argues that speakers are able to work out, rationally, the means of achieving particular ends, i.e. that they are engaged in purposeful discourse. Face refers to two needs – to be unimpeded, i.e. to be without hindrance from the other participants in the interaction (negative face), and to be approved of by the other participants in the interaction (positive face). What is of particular interest to drama praxis are the strategies which can be used to maintain or threaten the face of the other participants. According to Brown and Levinson, we threaten face in a variety of ways: by applying pressure, orders, requests, suggestions, giving advice, reminders, threats, warnings, dares, showing contempt, disapproval, complaints, reprimands, insults, contradictions, challenges, ridicule, bringing bad news, raising taboo topics, being offensive, expressing violent emotion, apologising, thanking, accepting, excusing, being unwilling, confessions, admissions of guilt, loss of control and so on. They also list forty politeness strategies to maintain face such as “noting and/or attending to the the other participant’s interests, wants or needs”, “exaggerating interest or approval of the other participant”, “asserting common ground/presupposing common ground and shared values”, etc... (Brown and Levinson 1987: 65). These co-operative strategies keep conflict at bay by one or more of the participants in an exchange gaining and maintaining power, and minimising the disturbance of interactional co-operation in what Brown and Levinson call “interactional balance” (Brown and Levinson 1987: 231). However, as Birch has pointed out, “the only problem... is that ‘balance’ is theorised here in an ideal world of language where participants are motivated to be as polite as possible and to maintain Grecian maxims of co-operation, when in practice we all of us operate in a messy, noisy world of discourse which is far more about conflict than it is about co-operation” (Birch 1991: 65).

1.2. Control

Dramatic dialogues are distinct communicative acts aimed at influencing the thoughts and actions of other people, at keeping them under *control*. The choices that are made by the participants in an exchange are, linguistically and discursively, oriented by, and towards, social situations and ideologies. We make choices in grammar, transitivity, mood, moves, exchanges, acts and so on, but these are not innocent choices. Texts are not simply neutral, ideologically uninvolved instances of different registers, but are institutionally determined, with certain registers more dominant than others. This domination can lead to the view, as it has done, that a particular register is not just more appropriate than others in certain context, but is more correct than others in all situations. What this serves to do is to oppress other registers. This creates a struggle for power which results in ideologically conflicting registers, ideologically different systems of classifying and controlling the world, as Father in Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* sums up:

FATHER: But can't you see that here we have the cause of all the trouble! In the use of words! Each one of us has a whole world of things inside him... How can we understand each other if into the words which I speak I put the sense and value of things as I understand them in myself... while at the same time whoever is listening to them inevitably assumes them to have the sense and value that they have for him... The sense and value that they have for him... (Pirandello 1954: 82)

It is exactly what those 'worlds' are that many people find themselves unable to describe, because though we may be aware of the meanings involved we are often unable to say how, why and where these meanings develop.

However, there are some alternative strategies which allow us to escape from the dictatorship of words and, consequently, from the control of socially and ideologically determined systems. Antonin Artaud, for example, searched for a theatrical language that was much more physical than verbal and consisted of "everything that occupies the stage, everything that can be manifested and expressed materially on stage and that is addressed first of all to the senses instead of being addressed primarily to the mind as is the language of words" (Artaud 1958: 38).

Another alternative strategy is the use of jokes, as Mr Walters, a character in Griffiths's *Comedians*, says: "It's not the jokes. It's what behind' em. It's the attitude. A real comedian – that's a daring man... what he sees is a sort of truth, about people, about their situation, about what hurts or terrifies them... A joke releases the tension, says the unsayable... But a true joke, a comedian's joke,

has to do more than release the tension, it has to liberate the will and the desire, it has to change the situation” (Griffiths 1976: 20).

Finally, linguistic shock tactics also belong to these alternative strategies and are widely used in contemporary theatre. Dario Fo’s *grammelot* is one of the more successful examples. This is an invented, theatrical, language, which draws, carnival-like, from a wider number of language sources in order to create a praxis which demands that the privileging of high culture (and associated standard languages) be changed. These non-standard languages are meant to achieve a similar purpose. Although at a superficial level these languages seem to create comic effects, they become a form of resistance against the tyranny of traditional languages and cultures. They are therefore designed to politicise the issue of different cultures and to present them not as ‘other’ but as a part of a mainstream multiple culture; as an opposition to a singular, elitist privileging of one minority culture, for example, standard spoken British English.

1.3. Roles

All of us, at every moment of our lives, are performing an institutionally determined role of some description. When these moments involve interaction with other people then those performances are more publicly ritualised, like the roles and fronts we may adopt in a church service, a classroom, an expensive restaurant. ‘Front’ is a term developed by Erving Goffman to describe that part of the performance which “regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance” (Goffman 1976: 91). We all have a changing number of socially determined fronts which we learn to recognise, manipulate and negotiate with. There is, for each of us, an institutionally determined lexicon of routines and fronts which are socially understood. Learning those routines and fronts, developing others, and recognising the meaning involved, is a crucially important part of interaction, and, most importantly, an integral part of language. As Birch has pointed out, role-playing “is not simply an innocent, fictional, activity which is linked to ‘play-acting’ in the theatre or playground, it is a crucial means by which we determine identities (i.e. subjectivity) and by which we interact with others” (Birch 1991: 108). Furthermore, one role is considered appropriate by some in one context, and inappropriate in another: the inappropriateness of roles may sometimes have comic results, but it especially serves to destabilise determined cultural and institutional expectations in order to effect change.

Directly connected to ‘role’ is the definition of ‘subject’. Traditional ways of thinking saw the ‘individual’, particularly in creative fields, as unique and rather more sensitive than others, a product of his/her own innate talents, rather than a product of social, institutional, discursive determinations. A contemporary

position would argue that “we are interpellated as subjects, rather than born with a specific social and cultural identity. We are constructed not just as a single subject, but in many different contexts and situations as many different subjects. Subjectivity is conferred upon us, and we, in turn, confer it upon others” (Birch 1991: 113). Subjectivity/individuality is not already there within us, but is an interactive process which requires other participants. The concept of subjectivity is one which is best defined in terms of *bricolage*, in terms of multiple fragments rather than single coherent ways of being. Our identity, our subjectivity, is socially and culturally interpellated into institutional discourses: we do not have an intrinsic subjectivity given at birth.

The French linguist, Emile Benveniste, has written that “It is in and through language that man... constitutes himself as a *subject*, because language alone establishes the concept of ‘ego’ in reality” (Benveniste 1971: 218). The reality, therefore, to which words like *I* and *you* refer is for Benveniste a reality of discourse. Language is only possible, Benveniste asserts, because speakers are ‘set up’ as subjects with words like *I* and *you* and with the various markers for person in discourse.

Keir Elam points out that drama is about “... an *I* addressing a *you*, *here* and *now*” (Elam 1980: 139), a way of distinguishing it as a different genre of discourse from third-person narratives. Drama, seen in these terms, is about present, rather than past, determination of person, time and place because it occurs as performance in the here at now. However, Birch states that “the here and now... is not a natural event. It is discursively determined by a number of linguistic signals and markers, just as the concept of person is” (Birch 1991: 120). Birch further states that “like time and place, subjectivity is not represented by language, it is determined by language. The determination – traditionally thought of in terms of deictic signalling (deixis) – involving the who, where and when of the action and interaction can account for a large percentage of a text using deictic determiners of personal, possessive and demonstrative pronouns; tenses; adverbials of place and time, references to the discourse itself; terms of address and naming strategies; honorifics and social markers, and so on” (*ibid.*). Deixis is not simply about linking language and situation by ‘anchoring’ utterance to context, as Levinson maintains in accordance with a traditional view within linguistics (Levinson 1983: 55), but it is a discursive, cultural, and political process, not simply a disinterested means of establishing spatio-temporal relations, or ensuring that the verbs agree with their grammatical subjects. Deictic shifts signal different points of view and these in turn determine and are determined by different ideologies. Therefore deixis is a conflict and struggle between *I* and *you*, *here* and *there*, *now* and *then*, *this* and *that*, and that often means oppression by stereotypes. For example, stereotyped notions of how other, non-native speaking people talk, are

not simply an example of humourous foreign-talk, but they are striking examples of one culture oppressing another by ridicule. In colonial cultures this kind of stereotype has serious implications insofar as it asserts the superiority of the dominant speaker group, who considers itself more skilled in language than the colonised. The same implications are found in the stereotypes attributed by a patriarchal ideology to women's language. Women have tended to be labelled by men, as Deborah Cameron points out, as disfluent, unable to finish a sentence, illogical, unassertive, using questions more than statements in order to seek approval, less communicative than men, and co-operative rather than combative in the way they use language (Cameron 1985: 35).

PART 2

The Complaisant Lover, written in 1959, is Graham Greene's third play and deals with one of the author's favourite themes, adultery, although the tone of the play is mainly light and humourous. In fact, the farcical elements, the jokes and the witticisms make it a typical domestic comedy set in the English middle class. The protagonists, Victor, Mary and Clive also embody the usual characters involved in the love triangle: the cuckolded husband, who is the last to discover he has been betrayed, the bored wife tired of her daily life and familiar duties, and the educated and fascinating "professional lover" who falls only for married women.

The Complaisant Lover opens on the living-room where Victor and Mary Rhodes are giving a party. Among their guests there is Clive Root, who runs a local antiquarian bookshop and does not seem to appreciate Victor's jokes and sense of humour. From the way Mary and Clive glance at each other, it is unmistakably clear that they are having an affair. A conversation which takes place at the party also touches upon the infatuation of Robin, the Rhodes's youngest son, for one of the guest's daughters, Ann, who is in turn in love with Clive. Once Mary and Clive are left alone, he suggests that they should spend more time together, but Mary seems reluctant to abandon her family life. However, with the excuse of meeting her old friend Jane, she goes on a romantic trip to Amsterdam with Clive. Victor, who is a dentist, is to reach her after his dental dinner so that he will also have the chance to visit some Dutch dental hospitals.

The second scene takes place in a hotel room in Amsterdam where Mary and Clive have spent a couple of days together. While Clive is out, Victor unexpectedly arrives with Dr Van Droog, a Dutch manufacturer of dental instruments who does not speak a word of English. After a moment of embarrassment and a series of comic misunderstandings, Clive manages to avoid being discovered, but, in a fit of anger, asks the valet of the hotel to write

a letter to Victor revealing that Mary was sleeping there with another man. Some days later, just before another party at the Rhodes's, Victor receives the letter and Mary confesses her affair with Clive, but adds that she has no intention of leaving her husband and family. Victor is upset and ponders suicide, but resolutely takes a decision. For Mary's love, he will accept the situation and force Clive to do the same. Clive therefore unwillingly becomes the 'complaisant lover'.

I now intend to leave aside critical judgements given on Greene's play and analyse in detail how the language used by the author works in the play, drawing on what has been stated in the first part of this essay. This analysis is divided into four sections: the exchanges between Victor and Clive; the exchanges regarding Mary and Clive; the language of Dr Van Droog; and, finally, the language of Victor.

Victor and Clive. The following is the opening dialogue of the play:

VICTOR: *Off on the wrong foot, arse over tip, and there I was looking up at the stars – I mean Oxford Circus. And what did my wife say – 'That word in nine letters was escalator'. Ha ha ha. If there's one thing I thank God for, Mr Root, it's a sense of humour. I've attained a certain position in life. There are not many men in my profession I would acknowledge as my masters, but I would sacrifice all that – the house, the garden that chair you are sitting on, Mr Root – it cost me no mean figure at Christie's, I like beautiful things around me – what was I saying, William?*

HOWARD: You were telling Mr Root and me about your sense of humour.

VICTOR: That's right. A sense of humour is more important than a balance at the bank - whatever William might say.

HOWARD: I don't say anything, Victor, you never let me.

VICTOR: Ah-ha, William has a sense of humour too, you see. Perhaps it's not so important in a bank manager as in a man of my profession, but it's not our professions that I have in mind. Mr Root, you are looking tonight at a very rare phenomenon - two men who are happily married. And why are we happily married?

HOWARD: Because we happen to like our wives.

VICTOR: That's not enough. It's because we've got a sense of humour. A sense of humour means a happy marriage.

CLIVE: *Is it as simple as that, Mr Rhodes?*

...

HOWARD: How are the *second-hand books*, Root?

VICTOR: *You ought to call them antiquarian, William. It's more expensive...*(emphasis mine)

(Greene 1985: 146-147)

As I have stated, one of the first threats implicit in language as communication is the illusion of conversation, resulting in an illusion of co-operation. However, when there are competing systems of making meaning, they are inevitably in conflict. In this passage the language used illustrates a struggle for power amongst meanings and this leads us to an analysis of the goals each participant involved in the conversation tries to achieve, a struggle of controlling others and being controlled by others.

From his first lines Victor makes clear what his system of meaning is: he is a middle-class man, believes in professional success, is respectful of the *status quo*, has a materialistic view of life ('I've attained a certain position in life...', 'the house, the garden, that chair you are sitting on, Mr Root – it cost me no mean figure at Christie's, I like beautiful things around me...', 'two men who are happily married...'). On the other hand, Clive's system of meaning is, at least for the moment, that of an intellectual and idealistic man and is immediately in conflict with Victor's. This conflict between these two different systems is reinforced when Victor does not seem to take Clive's profession very seriously and says that 'second-hand books' ought to be called 'antiquarian' because 'it's more expensive'. Victor and Clive fight to gain their own goals and this is signalled by discourse shift. When Clive says: 'It is as simple as that, Mr Rhodes?', he challenges Victor's system of meaning. However, Victor tries to be approved of by the other participants in the interaction (positive face). He maintains, in fact, the face of his friend William Howard by positive politeness strategies indicating some measure of co-operation. When he asks his friend 'What was I saying, William?', he implicitly asserts common ground and shared values as they can be both considered 'a very rare phenomenon – two men who are happily married'.

Victor is also very fond of jokes and likes to play tricks on his guests, but they do not represent an alternative strategy: they confirm instead his system of meaning. As far as the roles are concerned, Victor has adopted an extremely appropriate role for a party, as all his guests have. In this context, Victor's stereotyped notions about women, which emerge from his first words, seem commonly accepted. He points out that while he 'was on the wrong foot, arse over tip', the only thing his wife Mary said was 'the word in nine letters was escalator', a comment which certifies the expectations of a patriarchal ideology about women's language, capable of expressing only the banality of daily life such as, in this case, an unresolved clue in a crossword.

The conflict between Victor's and Clive's systems of meaning reaches its climax in the exchange the two have soon after Clive, afraid of having burnt a cloth, snatches up a cigar butt and finds it to be only a trick one, the glowing end formed of red paper:

CLIVE: I used to be very fond of these tricks – *when I was a child*.

VICTOR: You aren't offended, old chap, are you?

CLIVE: No. Interested, that's all. Jokes like this must be a compensation for something. When we are children we're powerless, and these jokes make us feel superior to our dictators. But now we're grown up, there are no dictators... (emphasis mine)

(Greene 1985: 149)

What is interesting is that, although Clive's discursive shift ('when I was a child') signals a challenging exchange, it does not undermine his role. Clive's role in fact retains all the appropriateness required for a party as a social event.

Mary and Clive. Robin's infatuation with Ann, which is not taken seriously by the Rhodes's guests, becomes relevant in the development of the play. In fact, it mirrors the relationship between Mary and Clive, which might otherwise be destabilising for the middle-class system. However, the language used in their exchange reveals that their love does not represent a real threat:

MARY: He *is* kind, Clive. Why don't you like him?...

CLIVE: Are you so fond of him?

MARY: Yes...

MARY: You shouldn't have chosen a woman with a family, Clive. My job is full time just as yours is...

(Greene 1985: 156-157)

MARY: What you and I talk about is so different. With Victor I talk about Sally's room which needs repainting. Can we postpone it till the autumn?... And then there is the dinner which went wrong. Too much garlic in the salad and the potatoes were under-cooked. Clive, that's the sort of talk that kills desire. Only kindness grows in that soil.

(Greene 1985: 158)

Mary's language illustrates that she is torn between two different systems of meaning, namely marital love and passion, two different roles, that of the good wife and mother and that of the passionate lover. She is obviously undecided, as can be understood in her hesitations and by the fact that she will not make a choice.

Clive, on the contrary, belongs to a system of meaning competing with that of the middle-class, but his words signal that the conflict is more apparent than real. As a matter of fact, 1) Clive would like Victor to divorce Mary so that he could marry her – "He would divorce you, wouldn't he...?" – (Greene 1985: 159) and, therefore, enter a system which he seems to despise, as he confesses to Ann:

ANN: Are you in love now?
 CLIVE: Yes...
 ANN: Do you want to marry her?
 CLIVE: Yes.

(Greene 1985: 155)

Moreover, 2) Clive represents the stereotype of the 'lover', who longs for love and is tormented by his life's adversities, as is clear from the conversation he has with Mary in Amsterdam:

CLIVE: The first day I was happy. Even the second. Yesterday was not so good... This was our life here. We haven't had a very long one. Three days of birth, growing up, and I suppose this is age. Why had he got to butt into *our* life?

(Greene 1985: 170-171)

Both Mary and Clive do not make a choice because she feels eventually at ease in two competing systems of meaning, as he does in his stereotyped role of the 'lover'. Their discursive strategies therefore do not bring conflict and, consequently, do not effect change.

Dr Van Droog. As has been noted, the foreign character who cannot speak English is a typical comic figure in British theatre and his appearance on stage certainly adds a more humorous flavour to *The Complaisant Lover* (Wilson 1959: 3). There is, however, an implicit threat in the use of this comic figure: inferiority in language use and skill is sometimes associated with racial and cultural inferiority. The very popular and successful television series *Fawlty Towers*, for example, depended for a great deal of its humour on the characterisation of Manuel, a Spanish waiter, as inarticulate and, therefore, incompetent. *Dr Van Droog's* foreign-talk has not this implication and it is only used for comic purposes and therefore does not represent an example of linguistic shock tactics designed to undermine the systems of meaning of Mary and Victor:

VAN DROOG: Wilt U aan Mevrouw zeggen dat ofshoon, ik geen Engles spreek. Ik er veel van kan verstaan, als men langzaam sprekt.
 VALET: He wants me to tell your wife that though he cannot speak English he can understand a lot if you speak very slowly.
 MARY: That's certainly going to be fun. Victor, would you mind going away for a few minutes – to the bar, anywhere, with *Dr Van Droog*. I have to get dressed...
 ... I'm not going to stand here in my dressing-gown, half naked, ... Take him away, Victor, or I'll push him out.
 [*MARY makes a gesture with her hand, but DR VAN DROOG seizes it and holds her firmly while he makes her a speech in Dutch.*]

VAN DROOG: Ik ben zo verheugd dat U myn uitnodiging aangenomen heeft. Myn collega's en ik zien Uw bezoek met ongeduld tegemoet.

(Greene 1985: 175-176)

Victor. Victor's system of meaning eventually prevails and his discourse strategies are the most adequate to his social context. He decides not to commit suicide as he is profoundly aware that tragedy is a system of meaning alien to the middle class:

VICTOR: I turned the engine on. I shut the garage doors. But the word 'silly' came to my mind... and the headline in the newspaper: 'Love Tragedy in West Drayton'. This isn't West Drayton, but the district is wrong for tragedy too... we are only dressed for a domestic comedy. A suicide looks better in a toga, and carbon monoxide poisoning is not exactly a Roman death.

(Greene 1985:201)

Victor is able to work out, rationally, the means of achieving his ends: he does not lose Mary, he convinces Clive that his decision is "the best for all of them" (Greene 1985: 205) and finally he makes Clive accept the role of the 'complaisant lover':

CLIVE: I suppose you can supply me with the dates of the children's holidays and your dental dinners. I'm sorry. I'm trying to work my sourness off on you.

(Greene 1985: 206)

In conclusion, Victor's discourse strategies have succeeded in influencing the thought and actions of Mary and Clive, in keeping them under control.

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