

STUDY GUIDE

PLAY SYNOPSIS

ACT I

The play opens on a jail cell, and we meet Montague “Monty” Navarro, a charming young man who begins telling us his tale of how he ended up here. His story begins in Edwardian London in 1907. His beloved mother has just died, and Monty is stricken with grief after the funeral when the peculiar Miss Marietta Shingle arrives, asking Monty if he has ever heard of the aristocratic D’Ysquith family. Of course he has, and Shingle tells him he is one of them.

For you see, Monty's mother was a D'Ysquith, but after falling for Monty's Sicilian musician father and marrying for love, she was disowned by the family. However, blood is blood, and Miss Shingle says this makes Monty ninth in line to inherit the Earldom of Highhurst. Curious but skeptical, Monty writes to the head of the family, Lord Asquith D'Ysquith Sr., letting him know of Monty's existence and inquiring about a job. Monty receives a dismissive letter back and is filled with resentment for the arrogant family.

Monty is deeply in love with the beautiful Sibella Hallward, but her primary interest lies in marrying for money and climbing the social ladder. Due to Monty's poor standing in society, while Sibella is fond of him, she marries someone with a higher status, specifically for his status. Her dismissal of his love hurts him even further. Fueled with a desire for a better life (one that Sibella would approve of), Monty attends a tour of Highhurst, where he meets the obnoxious Lord Adalbert D’Ysquith, and becomes emboldened to move forward with his plan.

Monty arranges a meeting with the Reverend Lord Ezekial D'Ysquith, a bumbling clergyman with a drinking problem, hoping he will help Monty because of his religious convictions. Together, they climb the tall church tower all the way up to the bells. The Reverend, intoxicated, slips and begins to fall - and Monty lets him plummet to his death. Monty feels little remorse for the death of the Reverend, and realizing he has one less heir out of the way to get that earldom, he begins to see the dark path that is laid out before him.

Next, Monty focuses on Asquith D'Ysquith Jr., a philandering heir that gets on Monty's nerves immediately. Monty follows Asquith Jr. and his lover Miss Barley to a winter resort, and after a failed attempt at poisoning him, Monty cleverly saws a hole in an ice skating rink and the lovers unfortunately drown.

Two D'Ysquiths down, and Monty's getting confident now. He is summoned by the head of the family, Lord Asquith D'Ysquith Sr., who apologizes for sending such a cold letter before. Now that his son is dead, he could use Monty's help at work and gives Monty a good-paying job.

Monty continues with his plan, targeting Henry D'Ysquith next, a simple squire out in the Salisbury countryside who is absolutely obsessed with his bees. When Monty discovers that Henry is allergic, Monty douses Henry's beekeeping suit with lavender, a scent that bees love. Poor Henry puts his suit on and that's that for him.

While visiting Henry, Monty becomes enamored with his sister (and Monty's distant cousin) Miss Phoebe D'Ysquith. Phoebe is sweet, intelligent, and philanthropic, and they find themselves drawn to each other, creating a bit of a romantic complication and love triangle for Monty.



Marco Alberto Robinson (Monty) and
Adriane Leigh Robinson (Sibella)

The next D'Ysquith Monty focuses on is Lady Hyacinth, a society benefactress who is looking for a good cause to get behind. The problem is - all the good ones are taken! Monty sends her on a wild goose chase to dangerous places around the world, and Hyacinth barely escapes with her life - more than once. Monty takes matters into his own hands by messing with the dock that her ship is docked at, and poor Hyacinth meets her watery death.

He goes after Major Lord Bartholomew D'Ysquith next, a bodybuilding fanatical who "accidentally" gets too much weight added onto the barbell by Monty, and Bartholomew drops the weight. On his neck. The next target is Lady Salome D'Ysquith Pumphrey, a terrible actress who is currently in a play that ends with a suicide by gunshot. Monty replaces the prop gun with real, and Lady Salome has a shocking on-stage demise.

As Monty climbs the social ladder, he finds himself torn between the now intrigued Sibella and his growing affection for Phoebe. What with Monty having money now, Sibella is back to being heavily interested in him.

Monty has become fond of Lord Asquith D'Ysquith Sr., who has been so kind and generous to him. At work Asquith gives him a promotion, and not a moment too soon because he too drops dead of a heart attack - not murder.

ACT II

As Monty gets closer to becoming the Earl of Highhurst, his love triangle grows more complex. Sibella has come to visit him at his flat for a sexy rendezvous, when there is an unexpected knock on his door. It's Phoebe! Monty has Sibella hide in his bedroom while he lets Phoebe into his living room. With each woman behind a different door, Monty races back and forth in a hilariously choreographed scene straight out of a tv sitcom, making sure that the women don't see each other.

Monty proposes to Phoebe, and she quickly accepts. Sibella realizes she made a mistake in getting married and dismissing Monty, because now he has money and stature and is everything that she both wants and needs. Monty is conflicted.

Monty is invited to a dinner at Highhurst, and puts poison from his pocket onto the unpleasant Lord Adalbert D'Ysquith's dessert. Adalbert insists that Sibella have his dessert and pushes it in front of her, but she isn't having dessert tonight. As Adalbert is reenacting a scene from the Boer War, he suddenly drops dead, face first into the dessert.

And so Monty is Earl of Highhurst, and marries Phoebe. An inspector from Scotland Yard walks up to Monty, telling him that he is under arrest for the murder of Lord Adalbert D'Ysquith. Monty is incredulous - he intended to kill him but his plan didn't work out! But the inspector insists he died of poisoning.

In court, things get confusing as both Sibella and Phoebe claim that the other woman was the one that poisoned Lord Adalbert. The charges are dropped and Monty is a free man. A guard finds Monty's journal where he has written a VERY detailed account of all that has transpired, telling Monty he will have quite the story to write in his memoir. Monty quickly grabs the journal and holds it close.



Shabazz Green (D'Ysquiths) with the ensemble: Jason Rexas, Madelyn J. Smith, Erik Brevik, Liz Brooks, Jeremy Rill and Katie Drinkard

CHARACTER LIST

MONTY NAVARRO: A charming, whipsmart, ambitious but initially impoverished young man in Edwardian London. When he learns he is part of the aristocratic D'Ysquith family and is ninth in line for the Earldom of Highhurst, he embarks on a darkly comedic journey of love and murder.

LORD ASQUITH D'YSQUITH SR.: The haughty and dismissive head of the D'Ysquith family. He represents the cold aristocracy that rejected Monty's mother, but manages to change over time.

THE REVEREND LORD EZEKIAL D'YSQUITH: A bumbling and frankly foolish clergyman with a lisp so strong it makes him spit.

ASQUITH D'YSQUITH JR.: A boorish and philandering young heir, more interested in pleasure than responsibility. Pretty good ice skater.

HENRY D'YSQUITH: A sweet country squire with a passion for beekeeping.

MAJOR LORD BARTHOLOMEW D'YSQUITH: A fanatical bodybuilder with a humourless demeanour.

LADY SALOME D'YSQUITH PUMPHREY: A dreadful, melodramatic actress with a flair for being over the top. Performs a scene with a gun in her hand.

LADY HYACINTH: An unmarried benefactress who is looking for a good cause to get behind, unfortunately so many are already taken by other society women!

LORD ADALBERT D'YSQUITH: The most pompous and unpleasant member of the family.

PHOEBE D'YSQUITH: A sweet, intelligent, and philanthropic young woman who is a distant cousin of Monty's. She is kind-hearted and genuinely falls in love with him.

SIBELLA HALLWARD: A beautiful, vivacious, and ambitious young woman. Initially focused on marrying for wealth and status, when Monty's prospects improve she's back.

MISS BARLEY: Asquith D'Ysquith Jr's lover who he takes on an interesting ice skating excursion.

MISS MARIETTA SHINGLE: A peculiar elderly woman who tells Monty that he and his mother are part of the D'Ysquith family.

THE DETECTIVES (INSPECTOR PINKNEY & CHIEF INSPECTOR TURVEY): Two bumbling but persistent police officers investigating the various D'Ysquith deaths.

ENSEMBLE: A rubber faced group who play various roles, including servants, guests, reporters, other members of society, and even the D'Ysquith ancestors in the paintings.



Full Cast of *A Gentleman's Guide for Love and Murder*



Shabazz Green (D'Ysquiths) with the ensemble: Jason Rexx, Madelyn J. Smith, Erik Brevik, Liz Brooks, Jeremy Rill and Katie Drinkard

CREATING THE *GENTLEMAN'S GUIDE TO LOVE & MURDER* MUSICAL

The musical *A Gentleman's Guide to Love & Murder* is inspired by the 1907 fictional novel *Israel Rank: The Autobiography of a Criminal* by Roy Horniman. In this novel, readers follow the journey of Israel Rank, an ambitious Jewish man whose desire to climb the social ladder comedically turns him into a serial killer. Horniman used the novel's plot to parody the anti-Semitism going on in England at the time.

This cult classic novel inspired the 1949 British film *Kind Hearts and Coronets*, where legendary actor Alec Guinness plays eight different characters with comical glee. Originally, *Gentleman's Guide* writers Steven Lutvak and Robert Freedman got the rights and created a musical version of *Kind Hearts and Coronets*, but when the film company brought a lawsuit on them, they decided to just create a musical inspired by the novel *Israel Rank: The Autobiography of a Criminal*, which was now in the public domain and free to use.

Robert Freedman: We met in the graduate musical theater writing program at NYU [in 1981]. We became friendly and we had threatened to work together for a long time. We were looking for something and we worked on another show for a while and then, Steve had seen this movie, *Kind Hearts and Coronets*, on TV...

Steven Lutvak: I was in college. It was 1978 or '79 and I wasn't sleeping, so I turned on my black and white television and two or three channels in, there was this movie and I went, "Oh yeah, that's *Kind Hearts and Coronets*; that's one of my dad's favorite films." And I literally bolted upright in bed, smacked my forehead and said, "Oh my god, it's a musical." Now, I know that sounds incredibly ridiculous and hyperbolic and over-the-top dramatic, but it's really what happened. And I happened upon a copy of the script and I remember thinking "it lays out like a twisted version of *Oklahoma!*" There are two women, with a man in the middle, and one of them is married to somebody else. So, it felt like it had the shape, even to my teenage mind, of a traditional musical, yet with this very particular, weird, dark tone laid on top of that. And I tried to get the rights to the film several times and then finally did. And then we wrote *Kind Hearts and Coronets*, the musical.

Kind Hearts and Coronets happens to be based on a novel that happens to be in the public domain. When we got into hot water with the film company, which rescinded its offer, we went back to the novel.

Robert Freedman: It's called *Israel Rank: The Autobiography of a Criminal* [by Roy Horniman], which we had read, from the very beginning. And we decided to take out everything from our show which was in the film, but not in the novel – which left plenty because we had already made up a lot of stuff. And we hired a terrific copyright lawyer who vetted everything and gave us advice and we didn't take any chances; we made sure that there was NOTHING from the film. And that turned out to be a blessing in disguise.



Steven Lutvak (left) with Robert L. Freedman (right)

Steven Lutvak: We found a few nuggets in the novel that were interesting and helpful. And when we had to go back and rewrite the show, it was enormously freeing to us, actually, because we had not only to sidestep what we couldn't use, but it freed us up to be wilder in our choices.

RF: There are eight people who die in the movie and eight people who die in our show. But there are differences in the occupations and the personality profiles, the identities of the people that get killed. They're all members of one family, but we couldn't use anything from the movie that wasn't in the novel. The murders in the novel were either not as dramatic or not funny and one was terribly tragic, in a way that you could never make comic. So, we just had fun making up new identities and new ways for them to die! It wasn't just who they were, but how they died. And I think not being allowed to use the stuff in the movie just liberated us.

Right before a production was scheduled in La Jolla in 2009, they were hit with a lawsuit from the movie's rights-holders.

RF: That was really an awful time. And this process took thirteen months and the judge dismissed a lot of the points that they had in their lawsuit. It came down to one issue, which is: could we have one actor play all the people in one family who get murdered? That wasn't in the novel, because it wasn't a theatrical performance, but it was in the film. Our attorney basically argued that, since theater began, that kind of thing's been happening. And the judge dismissed the case, outright, in March of 2011.

SL: The judge said, in his decision, "ultimately the movie and the musical are two completely different iterations of the same underlying material. The movie plants its tongue firmly in its cheek and the musical sticks its tongue out."

convocations.purdue.edu/qa-gentlemans-guide-love-murder-writers-steven-lutvak-robert-freedman/

COURTSHIP AND CLASS FROM VICTORIAN TO EDWARDIAN TIMES

Edwardian England (roughly 1901-1910) was a brief but fascinating period that bridged the Victorian era and World War I, and a time when society was deeply stratified by class. This rigid social hierarchy especially influenced the intricate and dance of courtship.

Edwardian society operated within tightly defined social circles based on birth, wealth, and occupation. People tended to interact mostly with those of a similar class, and this included opportunities for romantic encounters. Balls, social gatherings, and even everyday interactions were often segregated, making cross-class courtships rare and often viewed with suspicion or outright disapproval.

Marriage was not solely a matter of personal affection and love; it was often seen as a crucial economic and social alliance - especially if you were rich. Maintaining or improving one's social and financial standing was a huge factor when choosing a partner, and dowries and inheritances played an important role in marriage negotiations.



Postcard of a courting couple, 1910

For the working class, while romantic love was a possibility, the practicalities of shared income and survival were still important factors. For the aristocracy and landed gentry, lineage and the preservation of family estates were important priorities, so the family had a lot of influence on the child's marital choices.

Parents often actively sought after suitable partners with good social standing and financial stability. Even in the middle classes, parental approval was highly valued. Disobeying your parents wishes could lead to being shunned, and even disinherited.

The act of courtship itself was governed by a strict code of etiquette that varied by class. Formal introductions, chaperones, calling cards, and carefully orchestrated social interactions were necessary for the upper and middle classes. These rituals helped maintain social boundaries and ensure propriety in a post-Victorian world. The working class were less bound by rigid formalities, but had certain customs and expectations within their own communities.

Showing affection also had different rules. For the upper classes, public displays of affection were generally frowned upon, and communication included subtle gestures, veiled language, and carefully worded letters. The working class could be more open and direct.

Where they tended to meet was also class-dependent. The upper classes had exclusive social events, country estates, and fashionable resort trips. The middle classes might meet at church, through local clubs, or through family. The working class typically met at their workplaces, pubs, and community gatherings.

Cross-class courtships were often met with disapproval, and the fear of "marrying down" and its threat to your reputation was a powerful deterrent.

While the script for *Gentleman's Guide* does not say how Sibella and Monty met, we asked actor Adriane Leigh Robinson what choices the actors made for their history. "Marco and I like to think Sibella and Monty met in a hat shop as teenagers. Monty was working as a sales clerk, and naturally Sibella was there as a customer. What started as a flirtation, blossomed into a relationship that included many "firsts" with one another. We imagine that there were plenty of occasions where Monty was caught sneaking in and out of Sibella's window.

While class remained a dominant force, the Edwardian era also witnessed the beginnings of subtle shifts in social structures. The rise of a wealthy industrial and professional middle class began to compete against the aristocracy. More opportunities for social mobility slowly started to loosen some of the rigid boundaries surrounding courtship. However, these changes were gradual, and the influence of class remained significant throughout the period.

Q & A WITH TOPHER BLAIR, PROJECTION DESIGNER FOR *GENTLEMAN'S GUIDE*

Arvada Center: How did you find yourself creating projections in your career?

Topher Blair: In college I was a film major, and I got really into animation. After college, I was looking to move to Denver, and I saw an ad stating that the Denver Center for the Performing Arts had a projection design internship - that's how I got in touch with Charlie Miller there. I worked with him for a really long time, and it was so great to collaborate with him. Then in 2018, I went to NYU graduate school for their interactive communications program, with the thought that maybe I could do theatre and also branch out to other things with these skills.

AC: When you're beginning to work on a new production, how do you figure out what projections you will have to create?

Topher: It always comes down to a conversation with the director. Projections are unique as a field, because the first conversation is rarely ever "What kind of projections are we going to have?" It's usually "does this show want projections in it?" There are a lot of shows that shouldn't have projections in them, so collaborative conversations might say "if we have projections added to the show, how are projections going to be part of this world that we are building?" Then as we're figuring out what projections could do to enhance this world, that's where we start thinking of what these projections should actually look like.

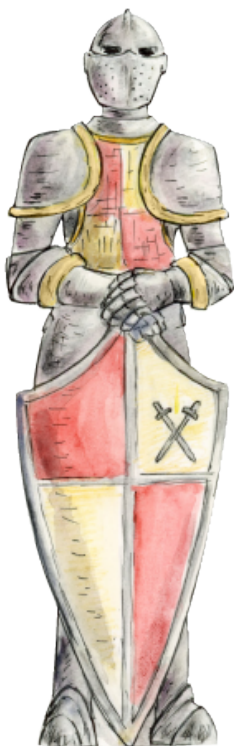
AC: In what ways do you think projections would maybe take away from a show? When do you think you shouldn't use a projection?

Topher: Sometimes there's this temptation to say "We don't need to build sets, because we will just have projections" - right? I have had those jobs and I have been happy to have them. But I think the projections work best when they are working in tandem, when the projection designer and scenic designer are in communication through the entire process, and they are both really trying to complement each other. That's what works out best. When projections are added on and the scenic designer didn't really think about them, that's when projections are usually not helpful and can actually be a hindrance.

AC: So it sounds like collaboration is very important for you!

Topher: Definitely. One of the things about this is that some of the projection designs that I'm doing are being incorporated into props and scenery, so basically I've got the style and look that I'm working on, and we're being really deliberate in bringing that into the real world as well. So there's a suit of armor that will exist on stage, as if it is this painted thing on stage, like a cardboard flat, and that's illustrated in the same style that's going on in the projections.

AC: After discussing the production with designers, how do you go about actually creating the projections?



Blair: Different projection designers go about things in different ways. I usually start with pencil sketches for the entire show. I might do a few mock-ups to communicate what the general vibe is, but when I'm actually working on the show - have you ever taken a drawing class or anything like that?

You usually don't want to start with the feet and then do ankles and then do knees and then go all the way up.... you want to start broad, get a large sketch of the whole thing, and then work in the details. Usually I will start with loose pencil sketches for the entire thing, and then get a rough idea of what things will look like, then I'll go in with fine pencils and ink, and then I'll color the entire thing. You may have noticed, I don't really have a lot of complete looks to share with you right now, because I'm in the coloring phase, and rather than do this look and then this look, I try my best to do this entire phase and then this phase in the whole process, until I start to have a vision of the play as a whole.

What's not always common for projection designers is how much of my work happens on paper. At this point, a lot of folks use computer programs, doing their graphics on their computer. But for me, with decades worth of experience as a professional artist, what works best is drawing on paper. It really is the best way to actually make cool things. I've been fortunate at this point that there are folks who just

kind of know what I usually like to do and make, and they say “oh this might be a show where we go for Topher's whole approach to projection design.”

AC: I know that in theatre, things like the price of lumber for sets has gone up so much, and you mentioned how you don't necessarily want to just use projections instead of a set. Because of those costs and trying to make things sustainable, it seems like there could be an ever-growing future for this. How do you hope to see projection technology expand?

Topher: I mean, I hope I get work contracts! But I think that's another part of the weird thing about projection design. The thing you want to think most about with projections is how to make it cool, but also show restraint, and that restraint means that you want to ensure that the projections are serving the live experience. You want to make sure they are able to enhance what people are coming here to see, and can be part of that story in a way that preserves what is unique about theatre. I think it's really good that more and more theatres have projections as part of their tool kit, and I want to see people doing projections in a way that feels clever and integral to the story, instead of maybe thinking of projections as a way to solve practical problems, right? Like your comment about the cost of lumber. Well that might wind up working in my favor, but if you are hiring me you may be investing money in projection technology - and it's not cheap! I hope in the future that more directors are able to consider projections as a part of a cohesive whole for their design.

AC: Was there a moment working on *A Gentleman's Guide to Love & Murder* that was the most challenging, or most rewarding to work through so far?

Topher: In terms of rewarding, so far the collaborative process has been really great! We've talked about bringing things into the world of projection, rather than bringing the world of the projections into the space. Those conversations have all been so much fun and so interesting because everybody's been really receptive to everything. In terms of the most challenging part.... I am sure that is yet to come. You know getting all of this stuff to work with actors on stage is going to be a challenge.

AC: When is your work done? Do you see a lot of changes during tech rehearsals?

Topher: Hopefully my work is done on opening day! I mean, it's a great feeling when a show feels really solid after your first run-through in tech. But there's always more work to be done, and if you are lucky enough to feel like you have a solid show pretty early on, then there are just more things to explore and more ways to be creative - so there's always more work that can be done up until the show opens.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

How does the portrayal of courtship in *A Gentleman's Guide to Love & Murder* reflect or subvert the social norms of Edwardian England regarding class?

In what ways did the economic realities of Edwardian England shape the expectations and outcomes of courtship?

To what extent did the Edwardian era represent a continuation or a departure from Victorian attitudes towards class and marriage?

Are there any current events that remind you of themes that arose in *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder*?