

The English Theatre of Hamburg

Established 1976

Presents

NO DINNER FOR SINNERS

a Comedy

by Edward Taylor

Premiere on 19 November, 2015

Preview Performances at reduced prices on 16, 17 and 18 November

Performances Tuesday to Saturday at 19.30 Hours

Matinee Performances at 11.00 Hours on Tuesdays and

Fridays beginning 24 November

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Established in 1976

Dear Teachers and Friends,

The English Theatre will premiere **NO DINNER FOR SINNERS** by Edward Taylor on 19 November, 2015, with the usual preview performances at reduced prices on 16, 17, and 18 November. Bookings for this hilarious British comedy have already started. See the cover of this study guide for dates and times of performances. You can help us advertise this production by placing the cover of this teaching material in a prominent place in your school, company etc. and by telling your students, colleagues and friends that they can download the teaching material from our website: <http://www.englishtheatre.de/teaching-material/>.

Teachers are invited to the dress rehearsal of this play on Sunday, 15 November, 2015 at 19.30 hours. Please contact Britta Schwalba at schwalba@englishtheatre.de to make your reservation. The text of the play may be obtained at theatre@samuelfrench-london.co.uk or www.amazon.com.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Edward Taylor, the well-known radio producer and playwright, was born in 1931 in Thorpe Bay, Essex, England. After attending Southend High School, he served in the Royal Air Force for two years. Later, while a student at Cambridge University, he wrote for the university newspaper and participated in amateur dramatics. During this period his play **BETWEEN THE LINES**, performed at London's Scala Theatre, became so successful that he was offered a job as writer and producer at the BBC where he worked for the next 36 years. Among the 2,300 radio programmes he wrote for the BBC, his best known was "The Men from the Ministry", which was broadcast between 1962 and 1980, and which included 144 episodes. The programme was also produced in Finland, Sweden and South Africa. Edward Taylor has written successfully for the theatre as well. His stage thriller **MURDER BY MISADVENTURE**, after enjoying a long run in London's West End, has been performed in theatres all over the world. In addition to **NO DINNER FOR SINNERS**, his other plays include **PARDON ME**, **PRIME MINISTER**; **PORTRAIT OF FEAR**; **A RISE IN THE MARKET** and **DIE LAUGHING**.

ABOUT THE PLAY

In this fast moving British comedy Jim invites his super moral American boss and wife to dinner. Since the boss insists that his employees be married if they are living together, Jim asks his live-in girlfriend, Helen, to pose as his wife for the evening. The request infuriates Helen who has been waiting for ages for Jim to marry her. She storms out of the flat leaving Jim with no wife to present to his boss. He immediately phones a series of former girlfriends, but not one of them is willing to help him out. His pretty young secretary Terri, who is infatuated with Jim, would adore being his wife for an evening, but she is otherwise engaged. In desperation, Jim makes the disastrous mistake of paying his eccentric cleaning lady Edna to play his wife, cook the meal and make conversation of a religious nature with the guests. Then more trouble for Jim arises when Helen, having undergone a change of heart, turns up, followed by Terri – both claiming to be his wife as well!

This comedy (2008) has delighted people of all ages and is perfect entertainment to lighten up the dark wintry season.

Summary of
Edward Taylor's

NO DINNER FOR SINNERS

ACT I, Scene 1

It is Saturday morning in Jim Watt's apartment in London. Loud noises are coming from the study where Jim is playing a computer pinball game. After a moment, the phone rings in the living room. Helen, Jim's girlfriend, emerges from the bedroom, looking sleepy and wearing pyjamas. She is an attractive young woman in her twenties. Helen goes to the phone and picks up the receiver. It is a colleague, calling from the agency where Helen works as a fashion model, to confirm the time for a shooting later that morning.

Jim, an energetic young man in his thirties, comes into the living room and is surprised to see that Helen is up. Over breakfast he reminds her that he has invited guests from America to dinner that evening. They are his boss Bill McGregor and Bill's wife Nancy. Bill, the International Director of the stock exchange firm in which Jim manages the London office, is on an inspection tour of their European branches. Helen has not forgotten about the dinner date. She says she is planning to serve tournedos chasseur. Jim knows that Bill, being a member of an anti-permissive society group as well as a deacon of the American Church of the Holy Scripture, is very religious and therefore strongly disapproves of unmarried couples, such as Helen and himself, living together. Since Jim promised that Bill would meet his wife that evening, he asks Helen if she would mind wearing a ring on her finger and pretending that they are married. The request infuriates Helen who has been waiting for ages for Jim to marry her. She refuses to be part of his hypocrisy, gets dressed and storms out of the apartment, leaving Jim with no wife to present to his boss.

ACT I, Scene 2

It is 4 p.m. that afternoon. Jim is working in the study while his cleaning lady, Edna Chapman, hovers the living room with a very noisy Hoover. When the phone rings she answers it, putting on a posh British accent. Then she calls out to Jim in her normal Cockney accent saying that a woman is on the phone. Jim comes in from the study and asks Edna to turn off the Hoover while he is on the phone. Stephanie, the woman phoning, is one of

Jim's former girlfriends returning his call. Like the ten other women he has already phoned, she, too, refuses to pose as his wife that evening.

Edna has gathered from all the frantic phone calls that Jim is in trouble. While he is explaining his desperate situation to her, his secretary Terri Pringle arrives. Terri is a pretty girl in her twenties who obviously adores Jim. She has come to get his signature on some reports that have to be faxed that afternoon to the States. After getting Terri a glass of orange juice, Jim sends Edna to the study to clean there. He quickly signs the papers for Terri and says that he has something to ask of her. But first, he wants to get to know her a little better. She is thrilled by his interest in her. She eagerly settles herself on the sofa with Jim. During their conversation, he removes her glasses to see how pretty she really is. She goes to put her drink down, misses the table, and drops her half-full glass on Jim's foot. As he wipes his shoe with a handkerchief, Terri puts her glasses back on and admits that she cannot see a thing without them. Jim draws her closer to him. As they are about to kiss, Edna bursts from the study into the living room, pushing the Hoover in front of her. Jim and Terri spring apart. Having taken in the intimate scene, Edna quickly pushes the Hoover into the bedroom and closes the door.

Jim is embarrassed and no longer in the mood to continue flirting with Terri. She assures him that she would do anything for him. Jim then blurts out his need for someone to play his wife that evening and asks Terri if she would like to take on the job. Hugely disappointed, she explains that she would love to, but has a rehearsal that evening at the amateur theatre where she is a member. Since she aspires to become a professional actress, the rehearsal is simply too important for her to miss. Frustrated, she collects the papers to be faxed to the States, says good bye to Jim and sadly leaves the apartment.

Edna enters from the bedroom with the Hoover. When she finds out that Jim still has no wife for the evening, she strikes a coquettish pose and offers her services. Jim doubts she is right for the role, which she takes as an insult. "I suppose you think I'm not good enough," she says. After Jim calms her down, she tells him that her husband will not mind because he will be down at the pub getting pissed with his mates. And she is a good cook, she claims, and will have no trouble chatting up the guests. In fact, they call her "Chatty Chapman" on her street, she says proudly. Jim is concerned about the difference in their ages.

She assures him, however, that with her hair done and plenty of make-up, the guests will think he is married to Madonna! Jim finally realizes he has no other option and agrees to pay Edna the fee she demands for the job.

ACT II, Scene 1

It is 7.20 that evening. Jim is dressed in a suit and tie and is laying the table for dinner. As he puzzles over where to put a piece of cutlery, Edna enters from the bedroom and strikes a flirtatious pose. She is now wearing heavy make-up, an appalling dress and has an exotic hairstyle. Jim remarks that she does not look like Madonna. Edna replies that, according to her hairdresser, Madonna is long out of fashion, so he created something original just for her. Jim is worried that Edna and the McGregors will not have much in common to talk about. She is confident, however, that she has plenty of “church chat” for the religious Americans because her uncle was verger down at the Reform Church...until they caught him drinking up the communion wine. Jim cautions Edna not to overdo it on the religious talk and to avoid discussing her relatives. Whereupon, she goes to the kitchen to prepare dinner, and Jim gulps down a gin and tonic to calm his nerves.

When Bill and Nancy McGregor arrive, Nancy is having a problem with one of her contact lenses and goes to the bathroom to fix it. She is a smart, attractive woman in her forties. Her husband Bill is a tough business man in his fifties. Jim gives Bill a scotch, and while they are talking about prices on the stock exchange, Edna enters from the kitchen. She says to Bill: “Hallelujah, brother! Fight the good fight! Praise the Lord and keep the faith!” Bill is surprised that Jim’s wife is religious like he is. “Oh yes, dead religious, I am. All my family are,” Edna tells him. Then, to Jim’s dismay, she proceeds to describe some of her relatives, all of whom appear to be either heavy drinkers or criminals. She also advises Bill on what domestic products are best for his company to invest in on the Stock Exchange. For example, Lionheart body oil. Her hubby likes her to rub it on his tummy after his bath, she says, laughing raucously. Bill is somewhat taken aback by Edna, but puts it all down to British eccentricity. Curious about the products that Edna has mentioned, he goes into Jim’s study to check them out on the Internet, and she returns to the kitchen.

Helen enters the apartment carrying two shopping bags. She has realized that she really loves Jim

and is prepared to pose as his wife that evening after all. In a panic, Jim informs her that the McGregors are there. But before he can tell her that Edna is already playing his wife, Bill’s wife Nancy, having put right her contact lens, enters the living room. She assumes, of course, that Helen is Jim’s wife. Helen apologizes to her for being late, explaining that her photo shoot overran. Nancy wants to tell her husband about a tip she got recently regarding the stock market, so Jim directs her to the study where Bill is on the Internet.

Jim quickly informs Helen of the situation, that Nancy thinks she (Helen) is his wife, and Bill thinks Edna is. Helen insists that Jim tell Bill that he must have misunderstood, that Edna is the cook. Bill will be easier to trick than his wife, Helen says. She then explains that, because it was late, she brought along Chinese takeaway for the evening meal, which she instructs Jim to take to the kitchen. Meanwhile, she will go to the bedroom, she says, and change into the new dress that she also bought on her way home. Jim mistakenly picks up the shopping bag with the dress and goes to the kitchen. Helen, unaware, takes the bag with the Chinese meal to the bedroom.

Bill and Nancy return to the living room from the study. They wonder where their hosts are. Bill cannot believe that Nancy thinks Jim’s wife is attractive. “She looks like Quasimodo on a bad night,” he says. Jim, who has just informed Edna in the kitchen that she is the cook now and no longer his wife, enters the living room. He persuades the McGregors to return to the study and check on the Borneo Stock Exchange which has just opened. Meanwhile, he has to inform his wife about a little problem in the kitchen, he tells them. After Bill and Nancy disappear into the study, Helen emerges from the bedroom, wearing only a bra and panties. She has noticed the mix-up in the shopping bags and heads for the kitchen to get the one containing her new dress. She is half way there before Jim sees and stops her. Then they hear Bill returning from the study. Whereupon, Jim quickly pushes Helen down behind the sofa out of sight.

Bill comes into the living room all excited because the shares recommended by Edna have soared in value on the Stock Exchange. As he tells Jim about his successful investments, Helen, who is bothered by the dust on the floor, lets out a sneeze from behind the sofa. Her head soon pops up above the back of the sofa. She says “hello” to Bill. Jim tells his boss that Helen is the cleaning lady and that she is on her knees dusting the floor because the Hoover broke. As Nancy hurries in from the study, Jim pushes Helen’s

head back down behind the sofa. Nancy is full of excitement because the shares that her husband just bought on the Internet are rising even further in value. Bill dashes off to see for himself, followed soon by Nancy. Helen gets up and is angry at Jim for telling Bill that she is the cleaning lady. He has made things even worse than they were before, she says.

Edna, irked that she is now just the cook for the evening, enters in a bad mood. She is carrying the bag with Helen's new dress and wants to know what it is doing in her kitchen. Jim grabs the bag, gives it to Helen and tells her to get out of sight and put on the dress. On her way to the bedroom she tells Jim to join her there so they can work out how to explain to Bill that she, not Edna, is his wife. Jim then orders Edna to hurry up with the meal because he is sure his guests are getting hungry. "And what about that little word 'please'?" she asks him. "Now that I'm not your wife anymore, I'm entitled to a little respect." Jim says "please" as Nancy enters from the study carrying Bill's empty glass. She sees Edna as Edna returns to the kitchen. Nancy has come to get a refill for Bill who, she says, can't pull himself away from the computer screen. As Jim pours whisky into Bill's glass, Nancy asks him who that strange looking lady was she just saw. Jim replies that it was Mrs Chapman, the next door neighbour, who helps them out in the kitchen sometimes. Nancy returns to the study with Bill's drink, and Jim goes to the bedroom to work out with Helen how they are going to convince Bill that she, not Edna, is his wife.

While Edna is putting melon portions on the dining table, the doorbell rings. It is Terri Pringle, Jim's secretary. She tells Edna that she is available after all to be Mr Watt's wife for the evening because the director of the play she is rehearsing got a migraine. Terri has brought along a dress that she wants to change into, so Edna directs her to the guest bedroom. Before entering the bedroom, Terri asks Edna not to tell Jim she is here. She wants it to be a surprise, she says. "I'm sure it will be," Edna replies sarcastically

Bill, carrying a half-full glass of whisky, enters from the study and thanks Edna for her tips regarding the stock market. When he refers to her as Mrs Watt, she makes it clear, in no uncertain terms, that she is not Jim's wife. "I was going to be," she says. "But after he got what he wanted, he changed his mind." Bill is appalled. "This is

the sort of thing that's rotting our society!" he exclaims. When his wife Nancy comes in from the study, Bill informs her that Edna is not married to Jim. This, of course, does not surprise Nancy because earlier she met Helen as Jim's wife, and was told by Jim that Edna was the cook. Bill is outraged even more when Jim and Helen enter and try to convince him that Edna, not Helen, is really the cleaning lady. Jim had told him earlier that Helen was the cleaning lady. As they all try to clarify the situation for Bill, Terri enters from the bedroom in a low cut evening gown and announces that she is ready to be Jim's wife for the evening. Because she is not wearing her glasses, she moves toward Bill, mistaking him for Jim. She stumbles on her gown and falls against Bill, knocking his whisky down the front of his suit.

ACT II, Scene 2

Ten minutes later. Only Bill and Helen are in the living room. She is trying to sponge the whisky off his suit with a cloth. Now that Bill has been given all the facts about the true identity of Helen, Edna and Terri, he blames Jim for exploiting the three women in such an indecent manner and for living with Helen without being married to her. "The man's a limb of Satan!" he says. When Jim (who has been on the Internet with Nancy in the study) comes in the living room, Helen leaves to see how Edna is getting on in the kitchen. Jim has come to persuade Bill not to fire him due to his behaviour that evening. He points out his success in running the firm's London office and the successful investments he has just made on the Internet. "We can thank that broad Edna for those," Bill replies. "When I get rid of you, I may hire her instead." Jim sadly returns to the study to help Nancy who is having trouble dealing with the computer.

Terri enters from the bedroom. She is now back in her day clothes and is wearing her glasses. After apologizing to Bill for embarrassing him, she tries to convince him not to let Jim go because he is such a great manager. When Bill refuses, she reminds him of their encounter at the Christmas party when she worked at the New York office. He was drunk, she says, and took her to the executive sauna where he seduced her. Bill, who says he cannot recall the incident, is outraged by the accusation. Terri says she can prove it happened because she knows he has a birthmark in his groin and because her friend Kelly took a picture of her and Bill as they were coming out of the sauna. Realizing that he is trapped, Bill promises not to fire Jim if Terri will keep quiet about what happened in New York.

Jim and Nancy enter from the study. She is so impressed by the success that Jim has had from buying shares on the Internet that she, too, thinks it would be a mistake for Bill to lose Jim's services. Bill informs her that he has changed his mind about firing Jim. "“Forgive us our trespasses,” the good book says. Sometimes we forget that,” he points out. Bill then tells Jim he can keep his job on one condition: that he hire Edna as a consultant.

Helen comes in and announces that dinner is almost ready. Then a loud bang is heard from the kitchen. Edna soon enters from the kitchen. Her front is covered with bits of wet food. She apologizes to everyone, and says there will be no dinner because the pressure cooker exploded. Helen comes to the rescue by offering her guests the Chinese takeaway that she brought home earlier. “Chop suey, anyone?” she says.

Multiple Choice Exercise

1. Jim runs the London office of an international (a. bank, b. stock exchange firm, c. charity).
2. He has invited his (a. colleague, b. tennis partner, c. boss) to dinner.
3. Bill strongly objects to (a. unmarried couples living together, b. drinking alcohol, c. using mobiles while driving).
4. Helen refuses to pose as Jim's wife for the evening because (a. Jim will not marry her, b. she is afraid of meeting people, c. she is a terrible cook).
5. Jim phones a series of (a. employment agencies, b. former girlfriends, c. female colleagues) trying to find a wife for the evening.
6. Jim's secretary Terri would love to pose as his wife but she (a. has a theatre rehearsal, b. is ill, c. has a jealous boyfriend).
7. Edna is Jim's (a. aunt, b. cleaning lady, c. neighbour).
8. She thinks she is qualified to play Jim's wife because she can chat with his guests about (a. politics, b. sports, c. religious matters).
9. Bill is impressed by Edna because she (a. is very educated, b. gives him some profitable tips regarding the Stock Exchange, c. reminds him of Madonna).
10. Bill seduced (a. Helen, b. Edna, c. Terri) during an office Christmas party in New York.

Answer Key:

1. b, 2. c, 3. a, 4. a, 5. b, 6. a, 7. b, 8. c, 9.b, 10. c

Interpretative Exercise

1. Discuss Jim's problem and the steps he takes to solve it. Would you deal with the situation in the same way? Why, or why not?
2. What is your opinion of unmarried couples living together? Point out some of the pros and cons.
3. Helen says that she will not be a part of Jim's hypocrisy. What does she mean by this? And what about Bill's hypocrisy? Discuss the difference between what both men say they are or believe, and what they really do.