

Blood Brothers

Context Information

Author: Willy Russell

Brief Biography: Willy Russell was born in 1947 into a working-class family near Liverpool. He left school at the age of 15 without academic qualifications and became a hairdresser. By the age of 20, he felt the need to return to education and after leaving university, he became a teacher in his home city.

Social: There was a large gap between working and middle class in Britain during this time. The Johnstones and Lyons families are class stereotypes. Many working class families struggled financially and to find work. There was also a class divide in education; this is shown when Mickey goes to secondary school and Edward attends a private boarding school.

Characters	
Mickey Johnstone	The lower-class twin. He is honest, sincere and goodhearted. He impregnates Linda, gets laid off, is arrested for Sammy's crime and ends up in prison and addicted to anti-depressants. His rage at Linda & Edward for having an affair drives the play's finale.
Edward Lyons	Is also good-natured but the higher-class twin. His sheltered upbringing makes him innocent but because of class he gets good opportunities e.g. university and a good job. His good-natured manner leads to the play's final scene.
Mrs Johnstone	Biological mother of the twins and a horde of other children. Left by her husband she gets a job as a cleaner. She is the moral centre of the play; is tortured by guilt and regret.
Mrs Lyons	Opposite of Mrs J whom she employs as a cleaner. She adopts Edward as her own child. Is haunted by the original act of a mother giving up her child. The guilt turns into suspicion and paranoia. She announces the affair and contributes to the murder of her adopted son.
Linda	Begins as a tomboyish young girl but both twins fancy her from an early stage. She only has eyes for Mickey as a teenager but later turns to Edward for comfort and support, which turns into an affair. Despite this, she loves both twins and is a sympathetic character.
Narrator	All-knowing and always slightly menacing- takes many roles throughout the play. Narrator constantly reminds the audience of the terrible choice that began this chain of events. Frequent mentions of fate and superstition but the Narrator claims it was class, not fate.
Sammy	When they are younger, Mickey just wants to be like Sammy. Quickly becomes a juvenile delinquent; even attempting to rob a bus as a teenager- he ends up in prison with Mickey.
Mr Lyons	Married to Mrs Lyons- away so Mrs L can adopt Edward. Grows increasingly concerned about his wife's mental health and wellbeing.

Key Quotations:
Don't you know what a dictionary is? Y'know the devil's got y' number. A debt is a debt and must be paid. How come you got everything and I got nothin'?
A mother, so cruel,/ There's a stone in place of her heart. If either twin learns that he was once a pair, they shall both immediately die. You've got to have an ending, if a start's been made./ No-one gets off without the price being paid. I could have been him. Do we blame superstition for what came to pass/ Or could it be what we, the English, have come to know as class?
She's cooing and cuddling as if she were his mother. It's a, it's a thingy, innit? That's what's going to happen if I have anymore trouble from one of yours. I warned you last time. It was more of a prank, really, Mr Lyons. I'd just dock his pocket money if I was you.

Themes:

Superstition: The audience is constantly reminded of this. The narrator asks us if superstition is to blame for boys' fate.

Class: Russell shows us the injustice of the class divide with the Johnstones and Lyons, as well as M and E. Related to education, opportunity and power.

Nature vs. Nurture: Splitting up the twins shows us how the environment can have a huge impact on life chances.

Relationship: The development and change in friendship between M, E, and Linda. The interaction between Mr and Mrs L, mother and son, and Mrs J and society.

Keywords:

Protagonist
Theme
Injustice
Stigmatized
Simile
Metaphor
Juxtaposition
Dramatic irony
Tension
Foreshadowing
Repetition
Dole
Manipulates
Prejudice
Dialogue
Ominous
Vulnerable
Working class
Middle class
Upper class
Act
Playwright
Stage directions
Contrast
Tragedy
Superstition
Social divide
recession

Margaret Thatcher: The first female Prime Minister in power during that time. She was responsible for lots of working-class people losing their jobs. During her time in power, unemployment rates were raised higher than ever before. She believed everyone can be successful if they work hard.

Marilyn Monroe: A famous Hollywood movie star from the 1950s who Mrs J is compared to. She is known for being glamorous, but also struggled with depression which led her to commit suicide (by painkillers).

Plot				
Act 1: before birth	Act 1- 7 years old	Act 2- 14 years old	Act 2- 18 years old	Act 2- the end
The play starts with the narrator talking about a 'story about the Johnstone twins' and two men laid dead on the stage. We go back in time where we learn Mrs Johnstone's husband has just left her; she is very poor and already has 7 children. She starts a new job cleaning Mrs Lyons' house and finds out she's expecting twins. She strikes up a deal with Mrs L as she can't afford to keep both so Mrs L convinces Mrs J to give her one of the babies as her husband is currently away on business and she can't have a child of her own. The babies are born and Mrs J begrudgingly hands one of the babies over for Mrs L to later fire her. The narrator states that one day the devil will punish the two women.	Mickey and Eddie meet for the first time by chance at the park and become 'blood brothers' when they find out they share the same birthday. When Mrs J realises the two have met, she is horrified and sends Edward home. Mrs L reacts more violently and slaps Edward when he swears at her. She even contemplates uprooting her entire family in order to escape. Despite their mothers' disapproval, the boys continue to see each other and play lots of children's games with their friend, Linda. They play various pranks and end up getting caught by the police who threatens Mrs J but flatters Mr L. Mrs L decides they should move, before Edward leaves Mrs J gives him a locket with a picture of herself and Mickey. The Johnstones also find out they are being relocated.	Both boys have become interested in girls but feel awkward. Edward attends boarding school. Mickey and Linda have romantic feelings for each other but Mickey's lack of confidence is getting in the way. Sammy attempts to rob a bus by holding the driver at knife point. Mickey and Eddie both struggle at school- Mickey insults a teacher and Edward refuses to take off the locket. When Mrs L finds out, she's appalled but is more upset when she sees the content of the locket. The narrator returns to remind the audience that the devil will come. Mickey and Edward meet, by circumstance again- Mickey takes Edward back to his but they are not aware that Mrs L is following them. Once the boys leave the house, Mrs L attacks Mrs J with a knife and curses her, calling her a witch. The boys meet with Linda and spend the summer together- an idyllic sequence follows as the trio age from 14 to 18.	At 18 in the sequence, the narrator warns that soon, both their joy and childhood will end. Edward has developed feelings for Linda and is at university whilst Mickey works in a factory. Edward self-sacrifices his feelings and encourages Mickey to ask Linda to be his girlfriend and she accepts. In October, Mickey tells his mum that Linda is pregnant and the two will be getting married. Their wedding coincides with a huge economic downturn resulting in Mickey getting paid off. When Edward returns from Christmas, Mickey is downtrodden and claims 'blood brothers' is childish. Edward confesses his love to Linda but she tells him she is married and pregnant. A desperate Mickey participates in a burglary with Sammy that goes wrong resulting in Sammy killing a man. They are both sentenced to prison and Mickey becomes depressed and is prescribed antidepressants which he becomes addicted to, even after he's been released.	Mickey continues to take the pills despite Mrs J & Linda's pleas. Linda, desperate, asks Edward, now a city councilman, to find them an apartment and getting Mickey a job. Mickey is angry about this and a devastated Linda seeks comfort with Edward and begins an affair with him. The affair continues and Mickey stops taking his pills for Linda's sake. Mrs Lyons reveals Linda and Edward's affair to Mickey. Enraged, he takes Sammy's gun out of the floorboards and confronts Edward, with a distraught Mrs J and Linda trying to get him to stop. The narrator warns the devil has arrived. Mickey finds and confronts Edward at the town hall about the affair, as well as whether Mickey's daughter is actually his. Edward denies fathering Mickey's child. The police surround the area and Mrs J bursts in and tells the boys they are twins separated at birth. Mickey asks why he couldn't have been Edward and then accidentally pulls the trigger of the gun, shooting and immediately killing Edward, the police then shoot Mickey. The play ends with the boys led on the stage and the narrator wonders what really killed the twins: superstition or the class system?