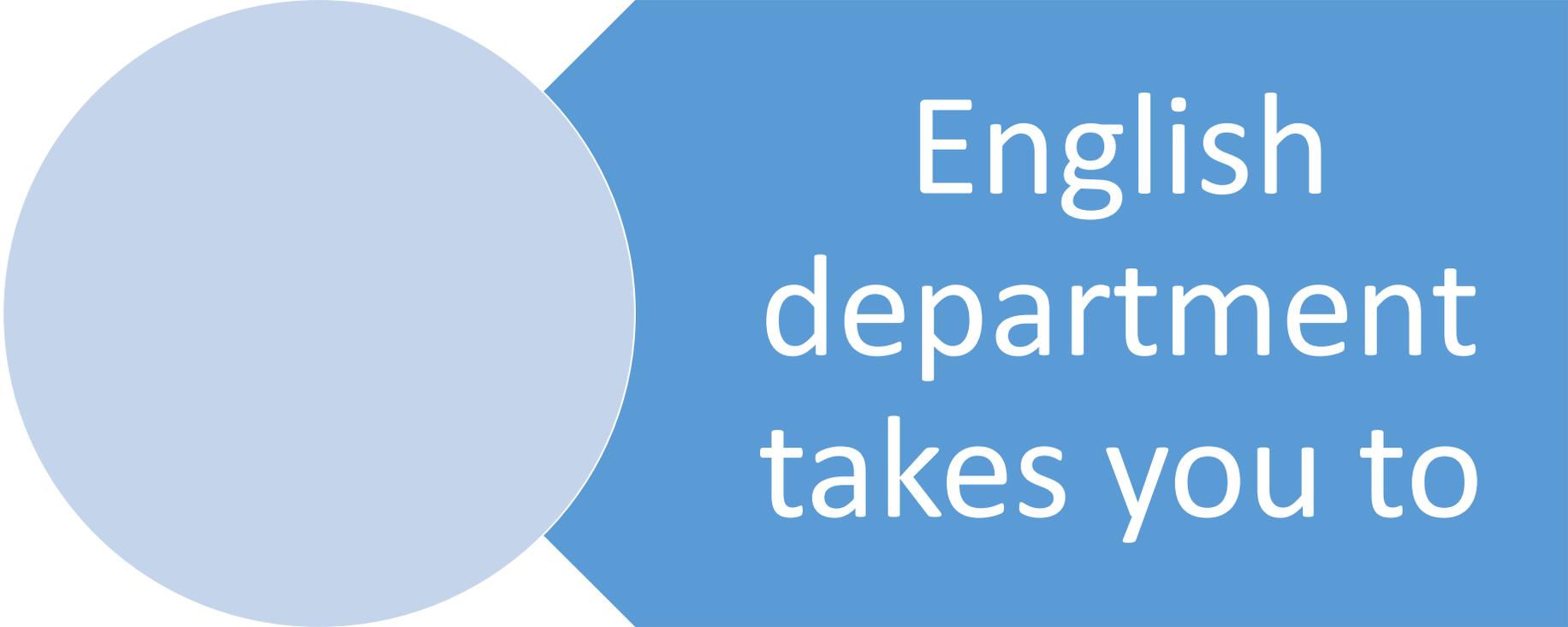


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English
department
takes you to

THE DUCHESS AND THE JEWELLER

- VIRGINIA WOOLF

"**The Duchess and the Jeweller**" (1938) is a [short story](#) by [Virginia Woolf](#). Woolf, being an advocate of addressing the "stream of consciousness," shows the thoughts and actions of a greedy jeweller; Woolf makes a thematic point that corrupt people do corrupt actions for purely selfish motives (and often without regret). The story "The Duchess and the Jeweler" reflects the English society of writer's time. It was an age of change. The high-ups were coming down because of their moral decadence and the commoners were coming up.

It is also interesting that the reader is given some insight into Oliver's past. We are aware that he is from a working class family, Woolf describing Oliver's younger days when he 'began life in a filthy little alley.' However it is also interesting that Oliver's jewellery store is described as being a 'dark little place.' This may be important as Woolf could be suggesting that despite the outward appearance of success in reality very little may have changed for Oliver. It is also noticeable that Oliver likes to know that the other jewellers consider him to be a success as this would also play on the idea of appearance and how important appearance is to Oliver.

SUMMARY

- The two main characters of the story are the jeweler, Oliver Bacon, and the Duchess. Woolf portrays the Duchess as carefree individual who is used to the extravagancies which her money and title afford her.
- Oliver Bacon is this story's protagonist. Once a poor boy in the streets of London, he has become the richest jeweller in England. As a young man, he sold stolen goods to wealthy women and marketed cheap watches at a higher price. On a wall in his private room hangs a picture of his late mother. He frequently talks to her and reminisces, once chuckling at his past endeavors.
- One day, Oliver enters into his private shop room, barely acknowledging his underlings, and awaits the arrival of the Duchess. When she arrives, he has her wait. In his room, under yellow gloves, he opens barred windows to get some air. Later, Oliver opens six steel safes, each containing endless riches of jewels.

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- The Duchess and the Jeweler are described as "... friends, yet enemies; he was master, she was mistress; each cheated the other, each needed the other, each feared the other..."
- On this particular day, the Duchess comes to Oliver to sell ten pearls, as she has lost substantial money to gambling. Mr. Bacon is skeptical of the pearls' authenticity, but the Duchess manipulates him into buying them for twenty thousand pounds. When the Duchess invites him to an event that includes a cast of royalty and her daughter Diana, Oliver is persuaded to write a cheque
- It may also be important that the Duchess calls Oliver an 'old friend'. It is possible that by doing so she is attempting to not only charm Oliver but to play on his weaknesses or insecurities as well. Oliver longs to be a part of upper class society and by suggesting that he is an old friend the Duchess knows that she is able to manipulate Oliver and in turn have him buy the pearls from her.

- The end of the story is also interesting as the reader becomes aware of just how vulnerable or insecure Oliver may be. After he realises that he has been swindled (again) by the Duchess he looks at the portrait of his mother in his office and asks her to forgive him, Woolf telling the reader that Oliver felt again like 'he was a little boy in the alley where they sold dogs on Sunday.'
- This line may be important as it suggests that even though Oliver knows that he has been swindled by the Duchess he may not necessarily have matured in any way since his days in the alley selling dogs.
- He is still unable to control his vanity and his desire to be part of upper class society. Something that becomes clearer when Woolf also tells the reader 'it is to be a long week-end.'
- Rather than pursuing the Duchess for the return of his cheque Oliver accepts that he has been sold fake pearls and if anything there is a sense that it is the Duchess who is controlling Oliver (by suggesting he could stay with her for the week-end) instead of it being Oliver who is controlling the Duchess. By playing on his insecurities the Duchess has succeeded in not only swindling Oliver but remains in complete control of him.

THANK YOU