

**GCSE**



## TWO FACES

MANON STEFFAN ROS



## INTRODUCTION TO THE PLAY

### SYNOPSIS

*Two Faces* is a play which deals with identity and the worries about life which affect everyone, young and old, as they attempt to find their place within society. The audience follows Elen, a young girl who chats online with Sam and falls in love with this stranger. The play raises questions about what happens on line and exactly how much one can safely share through a computer screen.



## THEMES AND IMAGES

### IDENTITY AND SELF-IMAGE

It is evident early on in the play that **identity** and **self-image** are key themes. At some point every character discusses their concerns regarding the way they are perceived by others. In the first scene Elen comments on her profile photo "*Breathing in so that my tummy looks flat - paranoid in that dress that my boobs might fall out*"; it is no wonder that she is so easily charmed by Sam when he shows such interest in her. Despite the fact that Mai is an older character, she too suffers from a lack of confidence which is demonstrated by the photo she chooses for her online profile. "*The photo takes ten years off me - I don't look like a teenager's mother.*" When the audience meets Mathew for the first time he admits that he worries about what other people think of him. He speaks about the pressure he feels as he tries to be part of the "in crowd" how you need to be "*laughing, or pulling a face, or doing something manly and sporty*" in your profile photo in order to appear "*normal*".

## “HOOKING” ELEN

The plot revolves around Sam’s urges to meet and have a relationship with Elen, and as we discover by the end of the second scene this is not the first time that he has attempted this. Consequently he knows exactly how to treat Elen in order to charm her into falling in love with him. He refers to these tactics as “hooking” and we see Sam following a specific system in order to achieve his intention.

- He shows how much they have in common and that he can identify with her. *“My dad’s a bit like that.”*
- Flirting with her and making her laugh. *“I’m offended. I’ve been here for a good seven minutes waiting for you to come online.”*
- Taking an interest in her and listening to her problems. *“D’you see your dad, then?”*
- Playing the victim. *“Everything was wrong, as if I was still dreaming.”*
- Making her feel special and unique. *“I’ve never told anyone about my father before.”*
- Pretending to be jealous of Mathew *“I got jealous for a minute.”*
- Giving Elen a ‘pet name’ by calling her *“Elen Marian Jones”* when he talks to her.
- Knowing what to say to win her trust. *“I don’t want to put you under any pressure.”*

## TWO FACES

As the title suggests, there is much focus in the plot on how everyone hides behind a “mask”, pretending to be different people, especially online. Elen tries to hide her real self behind her make up. *“She wears a lot of make-up - foundation that’s too dark, eyeliner and brow pencil, bright lipstick.”* She freely admits of her profile photo *“It’s not an honest photo”* and as Sam describes her, he says that her smile is false *“Elen’s smile is just for the camera.”* When Fiona discusses Sam’s strange behaviour, she says that he *“sneaks away in the middle of the night, and slips into another world where people hide behind screens.”* It is evident that Sam and Ellis struggle with their identity and who they really are. As Ellis says; *“Because we’re not just one person, are we?”*



### 'PIGTAILS'

Elen's hairstyle develops into a powerful image in the play as Sam refers to it with increasing frequency. Because Elen is so eager to please him there are regular references to her styling her hair in pigtails. "*My hair? Pigtails?*" This fondness for Elen to wear her hair as a much younger girl gives the audience a clue early on in the play that there is something strange about Sam's character.

### CLICK-CLICK-CLICK

Another extended and repeated image throughout the play are the words "*click-click-click*" which appear in a range of contexts. There are also other powerful images created through a variety of similes and metaphors such as the dramatic description of Elen's vomit "*leaving a streak of red, like the stain of murder, on the cement*" and Sam's chilling description of hooking Elen and explaining how "*The real talent is in how you get them out of the water...*" Perhaps the most powerful of these images, and a certain talking point, is the simile used by Sam as he explores Elen's profile. "*I click through her history, image after image after image - click-click-click like the sounds of buttons on baby clothes.*"

### SUBTLE SUGGESTIONS AND CLUES

Despite the success and dramatic tension of the play emerging from the fact that the audience doesn't realise immediately that Sam and Ellis are one and the same, after re-reading and studying the play in depth, it is clear that the playwright offers subtle clues from the beginning.

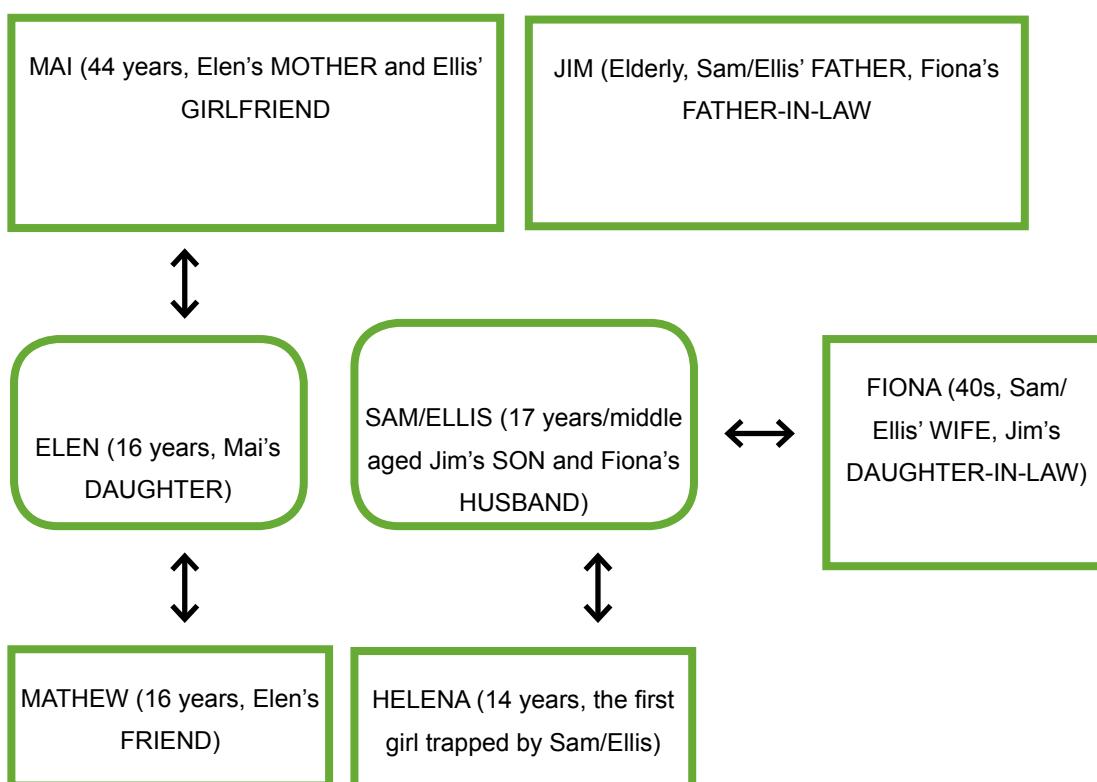
It will be necessary for students to consider whether or not they want to highlight these clues in their versions of the play, perhaps through lighting or sound. Here are some suggestions which offer dramatic irony when re reading the play.

- As the play opens, before a word is spoken, Elen stands for a long time in silence which suggests something odd or unpleasant about her or about that which is going to happen to her.
- In the stage directions, Sam is described as a "*young 17 year old man*" and within his

- first few sentences he describes himself as “*a special man*” who is “*very mature..*”
- When Elen refers to Sam’s photo she notices that it shows “*him on a beach, his back to the camera.*” She “*can’t see him properly.*” As she searches through his profile Elen notes “*There are only five photos of him. Five!*” and that “*he’s only one of a big crowd or too far away to see properly.*” In the same way when Mai looks at Ellis’ photo she says “*His photo isn’t very clear*”
- Elen doesn’t know how close she is to the truth when she is teasing Sam in the second scene. “*That means you’re a psychopath.*” and “*You’re really dangerous.*”

## THE CHARACTERS

When first reading the play without seeing it on stage, the technique of multi-roling and the fact that Sam and Ellis are the same person despite being portrayed by different actors could cause some confusion to the reader. Here is a simple diagram noting the various characters and their relationships with each other



**ELEN**

The stage directions at the beginning of the play suggest that Elen should look like any other “normal” girl. This is to ensure that it is clear to the audience that what happens to her could happen to anyone. The stage directions regarding her costume are therefore very specific “casually dressed - jeans and a plain t-shirt, no slogans.” In the second scene she has changed to her school uniform and there are no costume notes for scene three. Although it is suggested that their relationship was once close, the relationship between Elen and Mai is now more distant, although Mai would like things to be different. Once Elen begins to chat with Sam she no longer has time for her mother and neither does she share any details of her life with Mai. *“Don’t you ever knock?!”* Although Elen warns her mother to be careful when chatting to Ellis, she doesn’t seem aware of the dangers of her own situation and is often very naive as she ironically says *“I bet you say that to all the girls.”*

**SAM**

Sam is a complex character. The audience must attempt to decide whether he is trying to “hook” Elen and Mai with the sole purpose of hurting and abusing them or whether he is mentally imbalanced and genuinely believes that what he is doing is acceptable because he likes both Mai and Elen despite the disparity in their ages. It is clear that Sam has difficulties in socialising in the real world which is why he is so bound to the web. Jim states *“It’s like you don’t even want visitors at all.”* It is suggested that Sam’s relationship with his father and Jim’s absence has made a big impression on him. *“He’s hurt me. Jim. Dad.”* He clearly hates his father and blames him for his behaviour *“I want, more than anything, for Dad to die, so that I can forget.”* Jim and Fiona treat Sam like a child throughout the play by calling him “Sammy” and defending him at all odds *“After all, you was hurt. Heartbroken.”* The stage directions state that Sam dresses fashionably at the beginning of the play, and it is important in the first scene that he looks like an ordinary young man. However, as the play progresses Sam needs to appear less and less like an innocent teenager and to appear increasingly sinister, especially by the end of scene two when *“He sits, stroking the image (Of Elen in pigtails) on his tablet in a rather unnerving way.”*

## FIONA

Fiona loves Sam unconditionally despite all he has done. She is prepared to defend him at all times and sees Sam as an innocent who is easily influenced and manipulated. “*Does he know who’s there, really? It could be anyone..*” As a result of their strange relationship, Fiona shuts both Sam and herself away from reality in order to try and protect him. “*We don’t get visitors.*”

## ELLIS

The audience’s first impressions of Ellis are mixed. The stage directions note that he “*hangs around the shadows at the back of the stage*”, however later he “*steps out from the shadows with a kind smile. He seems a little nervous, and has to clear his throat before speaking.*” Just as Sam knows how to treat Elen, Ellis knows exactly what to say to Mai to gain her trust. He knows that Mai has a daughter and he reveals to her that he has a son who is “*only seven*” as a means of showing her how much they have in common. When discussing Elen with Mai it is clear that he enjoys the danger of chatting with both of them. “*She might have a fancy man on the internet...*”

## THE PLAY’S STRUCTURE

Manon Steffan Ros’ intention is for all of the characters to be played by four actors and it’s likely that the various parts will be divided as follows:-

**Actor 1 – Elen**

**Actor 2 – Sam**

**Actor 3 – Ellis, Men, Mathew, Jim**

**Actor 4 – Fiona, Police Officer, Helena**

There are only three scenes with a series of monologues acting as the foundation to each. At the beginning of the play there are many detailed stage directions, however as the play progresses this detail is lost. There are some ambivalent parts in terms of meaning; however

Ros has noted that this is intentional in order to allow an open, individual interpretation of the text.

The play has been commissioned specifically for the new GCSE course, therefore there are no previous productions which can be discussed in terms of staging and direction. However, here are some suggestions and points to be considered when encouraging students to explore how this play could be staged and directed.

## STYLE

As a result of the didactic nature of the play, the target audience and stylised staging techniques, the play certainly adheres to traditional TIE methodology. The characters often directly address the audience and the actors adopt multi-roles. This is especially evident when Mai is receiving messages from different men in scene two. Other stylised examples are in scene one during Mai's monologue when Elen's actions coincide with her mother's words and also in the short sentences when Mai and Elen introduce themselves online, where the director could experiment with the staging. *"Mai Jones. Forty four years old. Bethesda. Single mother to Elen, who's sixteen. I'm a teacher."*

## STAGE

Owing to the fact that the stage needs to be divided in two in order for the play to work effectively, perhaps a Proscenium Arch stage offers the best option to students as it can be easily divided. Despite the valid arguments that it would be easy to divide thrust and traverse stages, it must be acknowledged that many monologues and key moments occur as characters walk through the audience. To facilitate the staging of scenes

involving Matthew, Ellis, Helena and Fiona it may be an idea to have a "neutral zone" on the stage. This could be a rostrum/higher level on stage or an apron.

## SET AND PROPS

The stage directions note that Elen “*tidies some of the mess she’s just made, and then moves a low piece of furniture - a stool or chest, perhaps - and sets it centre stage, at the front.*” The stage directions clearly suggest dividing the stage in two; Elen’s home and Sam’s home. Key props are mobile phones, tablets and computers. The scenes take place in Elen’s bedroom but in Sam’s living room.

## THE SCREEN

As so much of this play takes place through a computer screen, it would be an idea to have a location on stage where it would be possible to project images and sections of conversations. During the play, Elen takes a series of selfies which she sends to Sam and having a projection screen would enable the audience to see these photos as well as some of the dialogue which occurs between characters.

## SOUND

The music in scene one is said to be “*something modern that has recently been in the charts.*” This will ensure that the audience will associate what happens in the play with contemporary life. The sound “*click*” is a powerful motif within the play and also a powerful aural image in many scenes. With its focus on online communication the play offers many opportunities for a director to experiment with sound; “*the Skype ringtone rings.*”

## DIRECTING THE PLAY

The stylised nature of the play offers students many opportunities to think creatively about directing. Here are some points to consider before beginning the process:

Neither Elen and Sam nor Mai and Ellis meet with each other in the play. It will therefore be necessary for the director and actors to consider how the performers interact with their computer screens. In the first scene Elen “*steps away from the laptop. She stares at it from a distance for a while*” but there are many other occasions where the director and actors will need to decide how the characters react to and respond to their technical devices.

The stage directions note that there is a “*strange tension*” between Sam and Fiona and students will need to consider how to present this tension. Pauses? Eye contact? Proxemics?

When Elen suggests that she and Sam speak “*face to face*” in scene two directors will need to carefully consider Sam’s reactions, as the stage directions say that this is “*obviously difficult for Sam*”.

During Elen and Sam’s conversation about Helena in the second scene, her position on stage will need to be considered, as well as the character’s reactions to what is being said about her. Stage directions such as “*There is something dreamy and spooky about her*” offer many ways of portraying the character. Perhaps through body language – restless gestures? Specific eye contact? Introverted posture? Or perhaps her character could be presented through visual cues such as makeup and costume?

There is a specific stage direction which tells the director “*Elen takes her[HELENA’S] place on the stage*” - can the director suggest that Elen will be the next Helena? Perhaps she could stand in the exact place and adopt the same gestures? Perhaps directing the two to freeze in a tableau would give the audience the opportunity to see the link between them? After all Sam has “chosen” someone with “Almost the same as my name.”

In the third scene Fiona and Elen walk through the audience and clash shoulders. Perhaps, through a brief freeze frame or a lighting change, this could portray that the two worlds of the play are also about to collide.

During the second scene Elen is speaking with Mathew through Skype and with Sam through online chat. The stage directions tell us about Elen's differing reactions to the two but it will be important to make it very clear to the audience. Use of the screen? Lighting? Specific gestures? Staging?

When Sam and Ellis “enter onstage, mobile phones in hands” in scene three, it is clear that the audience is to understand that they are in fact one and the same person. Will the two look more alike now? An item of clothing in common? The two wearing the same colour? Specific movements and gestures?

*Sharlaine Quick-Lawrence, 03.05.16 ( Translation RMS 27/05/16)*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Two Faces; Canolfan Peniarth

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