

READING MATERIAL

The Browning Version

SUMMARY

The present extract is from the play “The Browning Version” written by Terence Rattigan which is focused on a good but unpopular school teacher Mr Crocker - Harris. It vividly brings about the agony of a dedicated teacher who has a strict attitude towards his students. It starts with the conversation between a school boy Taplow and another teacher Frank.

Teachers like Frank encourage student like Taplow to make comments on their fellow teachers. Frank asks Taplow not to wait for Crocker Harris and leave. But Taplow waits for him. In between Millie, the wife of Crocker Harris arrives there and sends him to chemist’s shop with a prescription. The play exhibits that the boy Taplow is much afraid of his teacher and has to stay till his arrival. In this extract the author brings out the character of Crocker Harris through Taplow in a direct contrast to Frank.

The scene is set in a boy’s public school where Taplow arrives to do extra work on the last day for Mr.Crocker-Harris as he missed a day before. He is waiting for Mr.Crocker- Harris who has not yet arrived. Another teacher, Mr Frank finds Taplow waiting in the room and starts talking with him.

Taplow introduces himself and informs him that he is a student in the lower fifth grade. He tells that he would specialise next term if he got promoted. Mr.Crocker-Harris usually reveals the result on the last day of school and unlike every other teacher; he follows the rules and regulations strictly.

Mr Frank is surprised. He admits that the headmaster announces the results on the last day but that’s no criterion. Taplow says that it is only Mr Crocker-Harris who abides by this rule of not telling the students about their results before they are officially announced.

Mr Frank asks Taplow as to which subject he would specialise in if he got a favourable result. . Taplow says science. Mr Frank laments that he gets all slackers.

Taplow wants to specialise in science because he finds the subject extremely interesting. Frank, on the other hand, doesn't like what he teaches in the school. But Taplow says that it is much better than this muck, indicating the book in his hand which was "The Agamemnon" by Aeschylus.

Mr Frank is surprised that Taplow is calling such a great classic muck. He feels that Taplow sounds a little bitter as he has been kept in. Taplow informs him that he is there for extra work. Mr Frank is more surprised to hear that Taplow is doing extra work on the last day before the end of the term.

Taplow informs that he had missed a day of school the previous week due to illness and so Mr Crocker- Harris asked him to do additional work to compensate for that. Mr Frank tries to comfort him by saying that he would get his result for being sincere. But Taplow asserts that such rules do not apply for Mr Crocker Harris.

The day before, Taplow had asked Mr Crocker Harris about his result. He tells Frank what had happened mimicking Mr Crocker Harris. "My dear Taplow, I have given you exactly what you deserve. No less; and certainly no more."

Taplow is afraid that Mr Crocker- Harris would have rather marked him down for doing extra work. According to Taplow Mr Crocker-Harris is a different kind of teacher. He is too strict and 'hardly human'.

Mr Frank pretends to be unhappy but encourages Taplow to imitate his teacher once again.

Taplow asks forgiveness for being carried away.

Mr Frank asks Taplow at what time he was supposed to meet Mr Crocker – Harris. Taplow says at six - thirty. Mr Frank points out that Mr Crocker Harris is already ten minutes late. And suggests that Taplow should cut and enjoy playing golf. Taplow is shocked at this suggestion and is scared that Mr Crocker Harris might follow him home.

Franks admits that he envies Mr Crocker-Harris because of the effect he has on all the students. Taplow told him that he never shows his emotions like other teachers and never beats them up like other masters.

He is not a sadist. Taplow feels that Mr Crocker Harris is all shrivelled up. He hates people to like him. Taplow finds it funny that in spite of all the crankiness, he somehow likes Mr Crocker Harris.

Taplow recalls an incident when Mr Crocker Harris made one of his classic jokes. It was in Latin. No body laughed. Out of sheer courtesy, Taplow laughed at the joke. This proved to be a bad move by Taplow.

Mr Crocker Harris asked Taplow to explain the joke to the whole class.

Entry of Mrs Millie Crocker Harris.

Millie, Mr Crocker Harris's wife, is a thin woman in her late thirties. She is smartly dressed, unlike other school master's wives. She comes in unnoticed. Taplow was still imitating Crocker Harris when Mr Frank noticed her and broke off suddenly. Taplow get frantic and asks Mr Frank if Millie would have heard their conversation. Mr Frank thinks that she did.

Millie asks Taplow if he was waiting for her husband. She informs him that he is busy at the Bursar's and might get late. She asks him to leave.

Taplow is doubtful.

She advises him to go away for a quarter of an hour and then come back.

Taplow is scared and asked what if Mr Crocker Harris comes back.

Millie Crocker Harris gives him relief by saying that she would take the blame. She gives him a prescription and sends him to the chemist to get it filled.

Convinced, Taplow accepts the proposal and leaves happily.

CHARACTER SKETCH OF TAPLOW

- 1. Taplow is a sixteen years old boy. He is a student in the lower fifth grade.**
- 2. Tallow's conversations with Frank give us an idea about the likes and dislikes of Taplow. His conversation also provides insight into the character of Crocker-Harris.**
- 3. Taplow wishes to specialise in science.**
- 4. Taplow dislikes arts, especially the play 'Agamemnon'. He asserts that though the play is not that bad but the way it is taught is terrible.**
- 5. He presents his views about Crocker-Harris in a very frank and straightforward manner.**
- 6. Taplow has a strange attitude towards Crocker-Harris. He admits that in spite of everything, he still likes Crocker. He even admits laughing on his poor jokes was just to be polite to him.**
- 7. Taplow is too scared at the idea of disobeying his teacher, Crocker- Harris. In fact, he works for him even in his absence by going to the chemist to get a prescription made up for him.**

ABOUT CROCKER HARRIS:-

The small excerpt from the “Browning Version” revolves around Mr Crocker Harris who is a middle aged teacher. Although we do not meet him in the play directly, we get to know about him by the impression that he has made in the mind of his student Taplow. He teaches literature. He has very good control over his students. His students are so scared of him that they cannot think of disobeying him even in his absence. He is a strict disciplinarian. He has been nicknamed as ‘crock’ by his students. He abides by the rules of the school. He is so adherent to the rules and regulations that he never discloses his student’s marks before the headmaster announces the result. Although students are scared of him, but they still love and respect him.

CHARACTER SKETCH OF FRANK

Frank Hunter is Mr Andrew Crocker-Harris's colleague in the same school. He is quite popular in the school amongst the students but he envies Mr Harris for the fact that he gets his work done in the strictest way from his students and yet the students have a lot of respect and love for Mr Harris. He is a good teacher but at a loss of good character, he enjoys students speaking badly about a teacher and also motivates them to speak more bad of the teacher instead of telling them that making fun of a teacher, imitating a teacher and talking behind the back of a teacher to anyone is bad.