

Hodge Analysis of BABEL

I. Given Circumstances

A. Environmental Facts

1. Geographical location - The play calls for 'A city near a beach.' There is little detail given for the other locations in the play—the 'homes' of the two couples (apartments), a parking lot, a beach, a coffee shop—no other information or details are provided.

2. Date - The play calls for "The Future". How far into the future is unknown, but it is safe to say that it is the far future. They are able to determine if a child is going to be prone to violence while they are still in the womb via genetics, they talk about what it's like to not be certified and live in the Underground Village (implying that there has been enough time to have radical social/political changes in the world), and they mention a scarcity of natural resources (implying that we've used them all with time).

3. Economic environment - Everyone in the play at this point in their life is well off. They are all working and making money. However, one character (Jamie) is lying about where he works. He says he designs supports for shoes, but he actually works as an in-mind avatar who attempts to convince women who are going to have non certified children to get abortions. This is a secret for most of the play, and is only revealed to Renee. He says that at 18 he started working in the Village (a place for non certified individuals) and eventually moved to Reproductive Technologies. There is a point of contention in the play about Dani getting a promotion over Ann, but it's unclear if it's about money or prestige.

4. Political environment - The political environment (along with the social environment) is prevalent throughout the play. There are constant mentions of getting Certified by the government and that determining where you can live, what jobs you can have, who you can talk to, etc. It is a hard caste-like system supported by the government. What's interesting is that it is also brought up that the people voted for it to be like this. As Renee eventually brings up, there was a vote to pass the PRE-Certification

Law, allowing the government to require pre-birth certification. This is a point of contention between Renee and Dani, as Dani is in favor of it and Renee is opposed (though she did not vote). And because of this law, the social environment we see within the play exists.

5. Social environment - Due to the PRE-Certification Law, everything has changed. People are required to get pre-certified while in the womb. If you are certified, you're fine. If not, it means you have some sort of "genetic glitch" (Autism, Prone to Cancer, Prone to Violence, Depression, etc) and it is heavily encouraged by the government for the parents to terminate the pregnancy. If not, you are to live in the Underground Village, a ghetto for the non certified who are the grunts of society. The PRE-Certification Law is posed as a means of survival, with resources being scarce and it breeds a sort of classist environment where Ann threatens Dani with the information that her child is not pre-certified and Dani treating that as social suicide. It even goes so far as Dani assaulting the doctor to give her child the certification, it being that important to both her and the child. It is also noted that artists have virtually disappeared, so have school shootings. The best and worst "out liars" on the social/behavioral spectrum seem to have been eradicated in favor of a more placid, controllable "beige" norm.

6. Religious environment - While there is mention of God and the story of Babel, there is no relevant religious environment. You could assume that with these being brought up religion still exists in this world, but the play is about science and the ethics of that, not how religion ties into it. The closest it gets is when Renee talks about feeling like God when voting for the PRE-Certification Law and Dani answers, "Well, maybe if God did a better job, we wouldn't have to play him," (45).

B. Previous Action

Dani and Renee have been trying to get pregnant for about 8 years.

Jamie was identified as being prone to violence early in his life. So, at 18, he got sent to the Villages to work as a grunt for society. Eventually, he saw and fell in love with Ann and convinced his superiors to promote him to Reproductive Technologies and re-assimilate into society. Then, he met and married Ann (who had no idea of his past) and befriended Dani and Renee.

At some point, Ann and Dani began working together at Bakersfield LTD.

After Dani and Renee met, there was the national vote on the PRE-Certification Law. The law was passed. It is confirmed that Dani voted in favor of the law and Renee did not vote.

C. Polar Attitudes

1. Protagonist - The protagonist of this play is Renee. She is the one pregnant with the non-certified child, has doubts about terminating the child, and is regretful for not voting against the PRE-Certification Law. The play follows her struggle with deciding what to do with her and Dani's unborn child. She wants to keep the child, she loves it and doesn't want to go through getting pregnant again. However, the social and political norms (personified by mainly the Stork) push against her to terminate the child. This causes her to doubt the society she once supported. She attempts to find comfort in her spouse Dani, but eventually is left alone (after Dani's potential mental break) and decides to raise the child herself.

2. Antagonist(s) - The antagonists of this play are The Stork and Dani. They are the "agents" of this society used to represent the mindset behind it. The Stork is the most obvious, it is an agent (Jamie) placed in Renee's mind to convince her to have the abortion. The Stork uses arguments like "for the better of society" as seen in his story of Maximilian the Stork the Sixth (which later we discover is a lie) where an innocent child dies because Maximilian had an undiagnosed heart condition, something that would've been seen if he was pre-certified. Dani is her wife and argues for the validity of the society (specifically the PRE-Certification Law). She also uses the arguments of this being "better for the society" citing that only 2 mass shootings have happened and that Cancer is rare and the improved air quality.

D. Significance of Given Circumstances

The socio-political factors in the play are the most significant force on the protagonist. Pre-Certification is the law, and it is the expectation of the culture. To go against this socio-political order is dangerous. Additionally, the open and ambiguous nature of the details concerning time and place are important because they give the play a universal and timeless feel.

II. Dialogue

The dialogue is abbreviated, telegraphic, and suggestive. Sentences are often not completed, and lines are meant to lead the listener toward the unfinished thought.

A. Choice of words

I attempted to split my words into two categories. One being more natural and one being more scientific.

Baby, Mom, Nurture, Writhing, Alive, Stuck, Handkerchiefs, Nature, God, Babel, Adventure, Culture, Discoveries, Monster, Unworthy, Alone, Passionately, Articulately, Home; Perfect, Healthy, Doctors, Tests, Overreact, Genetics, Cognitive, Behavioral Aberrations, Sociopathy, Unknowingness, Uncertifiable, Oversensitive, Paranoid, Certification, Pseudo, Undiagnosed, Encroach, Unreachable, Unpredictable, Ghettos, Dysfunction, Capable, Uncontrollable, Unnamable, Essential, Progeny, Potential, Percentile, Privilege, Inflicted, Re-program, Implant, Colonizer, Programming, Oddity, Segregated, Unmentionables, Manipulate, Consciousness, Results, Optimal, Malfunctioning, Dysfunctional

B. Choice of phrases

I attempted to split my phrases into four categories. One being the more natural, one the scientific, one the random, and one the societal.

I love you, For us, Crumbling cobblestones, The uncompromising radiance of love, Colorful, writhing, alive, The pseudo other half, Little dreams, Fucking Practical Brass Tacks Probably Only Does It Missionary-style Ann, Maximilian the Stork the Sixth, Humanity is flat-lining, I am exhausted, High tide; Physical results, The perfect couple, We are healthy. Behaviorally speaking, The final test, Emotionally disturbed, Behavioral genes, Genetic re-testing, One quick shot, Wonders of modern medicine, Algorithmically unpredictable, Doctor's office, Undiagnosed heart condition, The fucking genetic code itself, The Fine Print of the Genetics, Predictive science, Genetic knowledge, Acceptable range of

behavior, Shabby genetic materials, Controlling, the uncontrollable, Behavioral tendency, Reproductive Technologies, Computer simulated hallucinations, Cold waiting room, Software glitch; Genetic dice, Biological dice, Roll the dice, C.S. Lewis in Las Vegas, Could indicate; Everyone says, Model citizens, PRE certificate, Population controls, To keep us all safe, Light Green Ribbon, PRE-Certification Law, Progress, Renee, Progress!, Remove the impurities, Play God, They are just genes, Survival of the fittest, Clean and pure babies, Miss Perfect, Branded at birth, The button, The Future Envision, Testing Technologies, Pallid uniformity, Weeding the garden, The New Eugenics, Genetic Cocktail, Unworthy of surviving, In-mind avatar, Mental terrorism, The community, Technological Babel

C. Choice of images

Despite being a play about science, the images are saved for more human things. Things like when Jamie and Ann are describing when she told him she was pregnant, “Crumbling cobblestones, every step a promise, the heat of the day pouring from our bodies down into the streets, down into each other, the uncompromising radiance of love,” (15) and when Renee is fantasizing about a child, “Little feet and fingers and growing an inch a time, sliding up the doorframe of pencil markings, big, bigger, biggest, until she grows into her teeth, and, the sharp ideas of the grown world,” (22). There’s a sense of humanity and love that cuts through the detached science.

D. Choice of peculiar characteristics

The odd thing to note here is, as said above, the structure of the speech within the script. There’s a lot of short sentences and self cutoffs. Also, there are several long and sustained monologues.

E. The sound of the dialogue

The shortness and structure of the speech gives it a quick, choppy sound as the characters plan out their sentence, start to say it quickly, change their minds mid sentence, and cut themselves off to restart the process.

F. Structure of lines and speeches

Again, the lines are short for prose and they look like stanzas from a poem. Also, when a character is cut off, there is not punctuation at the end of the

sentence, it just ends. Even when there is a long monologue, the dialogue is still incomplete.

III. Dramatic Action

The play revolves around Renee and her decision for what to do with her unborn child. To terminate and start over (society's argument) or to keep an uncertified baby.

A. Titles of the units (phrase for each unit)

The play has about 21 French scenes, mostly lining up with the numbered scenes.

1. Breathing Exercises
 - a. Renee - Breathe
 - i. Pg 3-5
2. The Dance
 - a. Renee - Stress / Dani - Comfort
 - i. Pg 5-7
3. The Call
 - a. Renee - Unloads / Dani - Deny
 - i. Pg 8-14
4. Red Tape
 - a. Ann - Pry / Jamie - Manage / Dani - Dodge / Renee - Panic
 - i. Pg 15-20
5. High and Dry
 - a. Ann - Soothe / Jamie - Repair / Dani - Dodge
 - i. Pg 20-20
6. Recovery
 - a. Ann - Pry / Dani - Recover
 - i. Pg 20-21
7. Maximilian
 - a. Renee - Burst / Stork - Shame/Guilt
 - i. Pg 22-27
8. Weed Ending
 - a. Renee - Muse / Jamie - Comfort
 - i. Pg 27
9. The Breakfast Story

- a. Renee - Attack / Dani - Downplay
 - i. Pg 28-37
- 10. Thinking Out Loud
 - a. Jamie - Hypothesize / Ann - Worry
 - i. Pg 38-43
- 11. What About the Artists
 - a. Renee - Burt / Dani - Counter
 - i. Pg 44-48
- 12. Everything Must be Fine
 - a. Ann - Convince / Jamie - Encourage
 - i. Pg 49-50
- 13. Jamie Reveal
 - a. Renee - Explores / Stork - Assure
 - i. Pg 51-55
- 14. The Tense Coffee
 - a. Dani - Threaten / Ann - Defend/Hide
 - i. Pg 56-64
- 15. Jamie's Story
 - a. Renee - Judge/Lash Out / Jamie - Confide
 - i. Pg 65-70
- 16. The Parking Lot
 - a. Renee - Stop/Plead / Dani - Inspire
 - i. Pg 71-75
- 17. Attempted Enlightenment
 - a. Ann - Panic / Jamie - Enlighten
 - i. Pg 76-80
- 18. Failed Breathing Exercises
 - a. Renee - Lash Out
 - i. Pg 81
- 19. The Pen Story
 - a. Dani - Break / Renee - Hold
 - i. Pg 81-83
- 20. The Handkerchief
 - a. Renee - Thank / Stork - Thank
 - i. Pg 84-86
- 21. Diana
 - a. Renee - Love

IV. Character—For each character, state primary (protagonist or antagonist) with poles, or secondary and how they drive the action, or 3rd or 4th level and function. Then...

Renee (protagonist)

Poles - Renee is the protagonist. The play revolves around her and her decision regarding the child she is carrying. The play starts with her nervous and unsure, she doesn't know if her child will be certified or not and if not what she will do. She ends the play with certainty and hope, even though her child is uncertified and her wife is in jail.

A. Desire - Renee wants love and stability. She wants Dani to love her, the child to be certified, and everything to be ok in her life. Obviously that doesn't happen, the baby is not certified, almost every time they're together Dani and Renee fight, and she's haunted by this Stork that actually her friend telling her to get an abortion. She wants things to stop and for everything to be the way things were before the child. When it was just Dani and her eating breakfast at a diner. Some personal climaxes for her would be her confessing that she didn't vote in the PRE-Certification Vote and her yelling that she is tired at Dani.

B. Will - Renee has a weak external willpower. It took her years for her to say that she was tired of trying for a child and that she didn't vote for the PRE-Certification Law. She doesn't want to impose her will on others and make a big show and be an inconvenience to others. However, I'd argue that she has a strong internal willpower. She didn't say anything, yes, but she also did not compromise her moral values. She's able to "grit her teeth and bare it" due to her willpower, just not make others bend to her.

C. Moral stance - Her standing I would say is high in relation to everyone else's in the play. She's constantly thinking about the ethics of her actions, presently and previously, and will always think of others before herself.

D. Decorum - Renee is in her 30s/40s, and is overall shy. She doesn't want to inconvenience others or get in their way, so normally she will work around their wants to get what she wants.

E. Summary list of adjectives - Shy, nurturing, empathetic, submissive, contemplative

F. Character-mood-intensity (heartbeat, breathing, tension...) - Being an easily stressed person, she probably is on edge a lot of the time. She is someone who tries to do the calming breathing exercises just right and will freak out if she's not. But she's also tired, carrying a child after 8 long years of rigorous testing takes its toll.

Dani

Poles – Dani is a primary antagonist in the play. She is meant to be the inverse of Renee. She's stern, headstrong, and tries to lead with logic rather than emotion. She begins the play with hope for her and Renee's child and their future together. She ends the play in jail, having given everything she has for her family's future.

A. Desire - Dani wants a family. She wants a family with Renee. She wants a family with Renee and to climb the social ladder. Dani is a character who wants to succeed, it's what drives her and motivates her. She's stubborn and usually gets what she wants. At the beginning of the play, she's on her way to getting that: a wife, a certified child, a promotion, friends, respect, all good things. At the end, after losing her friends, her child not being certified, and her wife saying that she feels alone, she loses it and stabs the doctor. She's lost, and she doesn't know how to handle losing.

B. Will - Dani has an extremely strong willpower. She's politically active and has climbed the corporate ladder. She has no problem inflicting her will upon others. It's only when her willpower meets an unchangeable fact (her child being denied certification) that she cracks.

C. Moral stance - Dani and Ann's moral stance are very similar. They believe in family, in the PRE-Certification Law, and succeeding in what they want. They don't have any qualms about their actions. However, Dani did stab a doctor and threaten to kill Ann, so her morality is probably the most grey of all four.

D. Decorum - Dani is in her 40s, and is overall confident. She's loud and smart and has no problem telling you. People move around her rather than her moving around people, it's what she's used to.

E. Summary list of adjectives - Strong, confident, passionate, devoted, ambitious, determined, decisive

F. Character-mood-intensity (heartbeat, breathing, tension...) - I would say that Dani's demeanor rarely changes. She's confident and strong, rarely letting someone get the best of her. She's steady like a rock (Renee's rock to be exact).

Jamie/Stork

Poles – Jamie is also a primary antagonist. He is meant to show that maybe the science isn't always right. He was marked as deficient by the government and yet no one can tell if he does not mention that. He starts the play working for the government with the hopes of keeping his family together. He ends the play opposed to the government, his future being unknown.

A. Desire - Jamie wants to be happy and content with his life. He is someone who was labeled as deficient and so was sent to the Villages to work. He broke out of that and found love, friends, and a good life. Aside from his job (that he hates), he's doing well for himself.

B. Will - His will is weak. While he believes that the system is wrong, he still works for it and tries to convince people to terminate pregnancies. When he tries to confront his wife, he backs off after seeing her response. He does have one moment of strength when he takes the helmet off, but besides that he is a slave to the system. But he finally bucks the system at great risk to himself and his family.

C. Moral stance - He morality is questionable. Again, he doesn't believe in the system (good) but he actively works to preserve it (bad). He does try to correct his wife's beliefs once or twice, but that goes nowhere.

D. Decorum - Jamie is in his 30s/40s. He is a slave to the system, having opinions but not voicing/acting on them. In a way, he is a reflection of Renee.

E. Summary list of adjectives - Obedient, Submissive, Caring, Secretive, Considerate

F. Character-mood-intensity (heartbeat, breathing, tension...) - Jamie is not necessarily care-free, but he does have it pretty nice. He hates his job and the system, but almost never acts on it in a substantial way. He's thriving in a system that he hates, which probably would breed some annoyance. I imagine slow, deep breathing for him.

Ann

Drive - Ann is a secondary character. The way she drives the play forward is to remind Renee of the societal pressures she comes with having a child that isn't certified.

A. Desire - Ann wants to be perfect, we can tell this from the scene where she's saying affirmations in the mirror. There's a strong desire to believe that she is perfect, as the government tells her that she is, but for some reason she does not. There's an intense desire to trust the data, but for some reason she can't.

B. Will - I would say that Ann's will is like a flimsier version of Dani's. It's strong enough to stop Jamie from talking about the problems with society when she doesn't want to talk about them and strong enough to threaten using the information of pre-certification on Dani. However, as soon as Dani pushes back she folds.

C. Moral stance - Her morality I would say is like Dani's. It's in line with society's with regards to the PRE-Certification Law and the Villages and all. She finds her moral strength in the law and society, not internally.

D. Decorum - Ann is in her 20s/30s and normally stressed. She talks about how worried she is for her child and has to do daily affirmations to keep it together. She's socially aware and lets her thoughts run away from her.

E. Summary list of adjectives - Tense, High strung, Emotional, Panicky, Self Conscious

F. Character-mood-intensity (heartbeat, breathing, tension...) - Due to her high stress, Ann is probably easy to startle. She's quick to move and quick to speak. I imagine a hummingbird when I think of her.

V. Idea

A. Meaning of the title

Babel is called babel because of the biblical story that it references. In the story, the people of the earth attempt to build a large tower in order to commune with God. God then destroys the tower and scatters the people, causing their languages to change and people disconnect. It's a story of people trying to be like God and God punishing them. Here, people are trying to be like God. They have mapped the human genome and are able to determine almost everything from that. Because of scarce resources, they use this to determine who lives and who dies. It's the idea that people are judged before they can even act, it's trying to tell the future and judge them accordingly, like a god. But with that you lose your humanity.

B. Philosophical statements in the play (quotations)

"Humanity is flat-lining. / Maybe safer. Maybe more secure. We will save water. / But, is that all of life? What about the adventure, the culture, the discoveries? Are we / willing to give all of it up for, I don't know, pallid uniformity?" (46).

C. What is the Idea (meaning) of the play

This quote is a good representation of the meaning of the play. This play is trying to say that, when you try to play god, you lose your humanity. In the act of judging people via their genes, they've lost that spark of randomness and unpredictability that made life worth living. If everything is already determined by your genes, why try to grow? Why try to learn? Why try? This play is saying that the more you strive for godhood the more you sacrifice your humanity.

VI. Mood (Adjectives and/or images for each unit)

I am going off of the written in scenes rather than the french scenes.

1. Sweet
2. Like your heart dropping into your stomach
3. Tense, Social Tightrope
4. Isolating
5. Uncomfortable, A fight between spouses unresolved
6. A disagreement resolved (for now)
7. The rift between spouses widens
8. Heartbreaking
9. Confusing, A resolve that quickly gets unresolved
10. Tense, Threats made in public with a smile
11. Empathetic, Two friends finding strength with one another
12. An explosion of grief with no comfort
13. A weird tasting resolution, Hiding knowledge that would hurt the other
14. Erie, Shocking, Startling
15. Calming

VII. Tempo (Graph and/or descriptive word for each unit)

I am going off of the written in scenes rather than the french scenes.

1. Slow, Languid, Serene
2. Someone letting it run away from them with the other trying to slow them down (successful)
3. A slight, tense pace consistently kept
4. Slowed back down. Stories are told, warnings are said, the calm before the storm
5. Again, someone letting it run away from them with the other trying to slow them down (unsuccessful)
6. Someone wanting to speed it up with the other wanting to slow it down (ends up somewhere in the middle)
7. Quick, tense. It's an argument.
8. Slow, tragic
9. Starts slow, cranks up when the Stork becomes Jamie
10. Slightly fast, tense pace
11. Slow, Languid

12. Starts quick, only gets faster until the climax of the scene (“I don’t know. / But you’re not,” (75)). Characters are not in control of the speed they are setting
13. Starts quick, Only for it to slow down by the end
14. A slow, chilling pace
15. Slow, Languid, Serene

VIII. Tone

While the exterior of the play seems contemplative and discursive, the internal world of the characters are in turmoil—Jamie longs to “come clean” and confess; Dani wants to force her will on the world; Renee longs to tell Dani everything she is feeling, but can’t; and Ann is so full of worry, anxiety, and self-doubt that she is about to burst. All of this turmoil under the surface of this play makes the conversations simply a thin veneer that covers the turmoil underneath as each character struggles with their own humanity in an increasing inhumane world.