The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel Study Guide

The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel by David Rabe

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Introduction

David Rabe's *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel* was the first American play of stature to deal with the experience of the Vietnam War. At least one historian of the Vietnam era, Philip Beidler writing in *American Literature and the Experience of Vietnam,* found that Rabe made "the most important contributions to the dramatic literature of Vietnam during the period 1970-75." After being rejected by numerous regional and experimental theaters, the play was first produced professionally in 1971 at the Public Theatre by Joseph Papp's New York Shakespeare Festival, one of the country's most prestigious production organizations. Rabe's professional debut was a success: *Pavlo Hummel* enjoyed a run of 363 performances and received predominantly enthusiastic critical response. Clive Barnes of the *New York Times* acclaimed Rabe as a "new and authentic voice of our theatre." For this play, Rabe received the *Village Voice's* Obie Award for distinguished playwriting, and a Drama Desk Award for most promising playwright.

From trying to keep a journal during his military service in Vietnam, Rabe found that bis experience there defied description, exceeding the capabilities of "language as mere symbol," as he wrote in his introduction to *Two Plays: The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel and Sticks and Bones.* Unwilling to bring his "full sensibility to bear upon all elements" of the experience, Rabe "skimmed over things and hoped they would skim over me." In Rabe's depiction, the Vietnam experience is a "surreal carnival of death," reflected in Pavlo's extremely confused state of mind, and in the mood of expressionism throughout the play. *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel* is not strictly an anti-war play; its author believes that war is inevitably a part of what he calls the "eternal human pageant." Instead, Rabe examines the process of basic training as an American rite of passage, using his metaphor to illustrate the coercive power of the institution. Rabe himself called military basic training a metaphor for the "essential" training by which society reshapes all individuals.

Author Biography

David Rabe was born March 10,1940, m Dubuque, Iowa, the son of a high school teacher who later became a meatpacker, and a department store worker. He was educated at Catholic institutions for whom he also played football He earned his B.A. from Loras College in 1962. Rabe went to Villanova University in Philadelphia for a master's degree in theatre but was drafted before he completed the program of study. From 1965 to 1967 he served in the U.S. Army, with eleven months of duty in Vietnam. Rabe—like his character Pavlo Hummel— was assigned to hospital duty, and though he did not engage in combat, he witnessed fighting at close range. His experience in Vietnam—particularly his shock at the youth, and inexperience of the soldiers dying there—provided the substance for his early theatrical successes.

As he recalls in the introduction to *Two Plays: The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel and Sticks and Bones,* Rabe says that when he returned from Vietnam it was six months before he thought seriously of writing; he began only when he realized "there was nothing else to do with the things I was thinking " Rabe returned to Villanova to complete his master's degree, afterwards holding a variety of jobs, including feature writer for the *New Haven Register* and assistant professor at Villanova. In 1969 he married Elizabeth Pan, a laboratory technician. The couple had a son, Jason, but the marriage ended in separation. (Rabe later married actress Jill Clayburgh in March, 1979.)

Rabe made an impressive theatrical debut in 1971, with the professional productions of his plays *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel* and *Sticks and Bones.* The plays were received enthusiastically as challenging explorations of America's involvement in Vietnam written by a soldier who had served there. The success of these two plays assured Rabe's place in the contemporary American theatre, a reputation later cemented by *Streamers* (1976), widely considered to be his most accomplished play. The three plays are taken collectively as Rabe's "Vietnam trilogy," although they were not conceived or executed as a cohesive cycle.

Rabe's Vietnam plays are full of dark humor and stark images, expressing with lyrical and symbolic language the rage of alienated characters. The most well-known of Rabe's other dramatic works are *In the Boom Boom Room* (1973), about the humiliation and exploitation of a female go-go dancer, and *Hurlyburly* (1984), a bitter comedy about the Hollywood entertainment industry. Rabe's other works include the plays *The Orphan* (first produced 1974), *The Crossing* (a one-act, produced at Villanova around 1963 and professionally in 1976), and *Goose and Tomtom* (written 1978, produced 1982).

In addition to adapting several of his own works to film (including *Streamers),* Rabe has written screenplays for the films *I'm Dancing as Fast as I Can, Casualties of War,* and others. The many honors Rabe has received during his playwriting career include an Obie Award, a Drama Desk Award, and a Drama Guild Award—all for *Pavlo Hummel.* He has also won an Antionette ("Tony") Perry Award for Best Play (for *Sticks and*

Bones), a New York Drama Critics Circle Award for Best American Play (for *Streamers),* as well as a Rockefeller grant and a Guggenheim fellowship.

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Plot Summary

Act I

The play opens with the title character, Pavlo, in a Vietnamese brothel with the prostitute Yen. Pavlo brags about his various escapades as a soldier, but underneath his bravado he appears insecure and edgy. A grenade is tossed through the window, Pavlo picks it up and attempts to throw it back out, but it explodes, mortally wounding him. Ardell enters, a black soldier in a "strangely unreal" uniform who serves as Pavlo's alter ego throughout the play (only Pavlo can see or hear Ardell). Ardell's *David Rabe* entrance triggers for the dying Pavlo a flashback of his army life; this jumbled series of recollections constitute the fragmented action of the play.

The action goes back in time to Pavlo's arrival at boot camp. There he encounters Sergeant Tower, the imposing drill sergeant ("I'm bigger than my name"), who immediately isolates Pavlo for "looking about at the air like some kinda fool" and makes him do push-ups; this initiates a pattern which is repeated throughout the play.

Though Pavlo desperately wants to identify as part of a group, his quirky individualism gets him in trouble not only with Tower but with the other recruits as well. Two of these men, Kress and Parker, are working in a furnace room and are particularly dissatisfied with their situation. Their comments reveal that Pavlo has quickly developed a bad reputation: Kress in particular curses the army for "stickin' me in with weird people" and wishes that Hummel would die. When Kress and Parker leave, Pavlo tries to please the squad leader. Pierce, by reciting the Genera! Orders, to "see if I'm sharp enough to be one a your boys." When the whistle for company formation is blown, however, Pavlo ignores it. and is again reprimanded by Tower. Pavlo is then confronted by a group of trainees who accuse him of stealing a soldier's wallet and consequently give him a "blanket party" (that is. they cover him in a blanket and collectively beat him).

The end of basic training arrives, and when the scores of the final proficiency tests are announced, Kress and one other soldier have been held back. They will be "recycled" (sent back for eight more weeks of training), while the rest of the men are sent home until Ihey receive their assignments. Pavlo tells Kress "1 feel sorry for you" and asks him several questions. Kress feels he is being taunted, so he attacks Pavlo and can only be subdued with great difficulty.

Pavlo, having blurted out previously that he plans to kill himself, swallows an entire bottle of aspirin; his life is on the line as the other men attempt to revive him. The act closes with a monologue of ArdelJ's in which he tells Pavlo, "Ain't doin' you no good you wish you dead, 'cause you ain't, man." Ardell transforms Pavlo by putting the latter in his dress uniform and sunglasses, preparing him for his trip home.

Act II

The act opens on an address by the Captain to the platoon regarding the commencement of bombing campaigns against North Vietnam. The troops scatter at the end of this speech, and the scene changes immediately to Pavlo's arrival at the home of his half-brother, Mickey. The relationship between Pavlo and Mickey is somewhat strained Pavlo appears anxious to prove himself as Mickey provokes him by refusing to believe Pavlo is in the army and stating that "Vietnam don't even exist " Pavlo lies about his relationships with the other men in his platoon, claiming "I got people who respect me."

Pavlo's frustrations at home continue as he unsuccessfully attempts to track down an old girlfriend, Joanna, whom he suggests might have killed herself out of despair (in reality, she is now married). Pavlo is then thwarted in his attempts to get his mother to reveal to him the identity of his father. Instead, Mrs. Hummel is fixated on a story about a coworker learning of her son's death in Vietnam; "I know what to expect," she says to Pavlo, a foreshadowing of Pavlo's own demise.

Interspersed with these scenes of home life are glimpses of Pavlo with his platoon. The scene then shifts fully to Vietnam, where Pavlo, despite his protests, has been posted as a medic at a mobile hospital. The setting of the field hospital—where Pavlo cares for the crippled Sgt. Brisbey—is juxtaposed against the setting of Mamasan's brothel, where Pavlo meets Jones and has his first sexual experience with the prostitute Yen. The scene of Pavlo and Yen's lovemaking is interspersed with another of Sergeant Tower's lectures to the platoon, this one about the care of their M-16 nfle: "You got to have feehn' for it, like it a good woman to you. ." Pavlo marches away from his bed as the rest of the troops move out, and the scene changes back to the hospital. Brisbey is obviously depressed about his condition. ("Some guys, they get hit, they have a stump," he says. "I am a stump.") Brisbey hints at a desire to commit suicide, asking for Pavlo's rifle to "save you from the sm of cruelty," but Pavlo refuses, attempting to dissuade Bnsbey from his suicidal thoughts.

The setting of the field hospital is juxtaposed against a scene of Parhara, a young Black PFC, attempting to cross a dangerous field under orders. Parham is wounded and cries for a medic, instead he is discovered by two Viet Cong who torture him for information, then kill him. Pavlo arrives with Ryan, and in attempting to remove Parham's body from the field, Pavlo is wounded. Ryan returns to retrieve Pavlo, as a body detail removes Parham; these actions are juxtaposed against a series of addresses by Sergeant Tower to his troops. A series of short scenes follow dramatizing Pavlo being wounded two more times. Pavlo begins agitating to be sent home; instead, he is given the Purple Heart and sent back to duty.

At Mamasan's brothel, Pavlo is quarreling with Sergeant Wall over the attentions of Yen, "the whore I usually hit on." Pavlo assaults Wall, who leaves and returns moments later, throwing in the grenade which kills Pavlo. Ardell and Pavlo have their final interaction as Pavlo is sealed in his coffin Pavlo admits that in the end, the cause for and the

circumstances under which he died are "all shit." This serves as the play's final pronouncement on not only war, but the human condition more broadly, as Ardell slams Pavlo's coffin shut and exits the stage.

Act 1, Part 1

Act 1, Part 1 Summary

Set during the Vietnam War in the late 1960's, this play tells the story of a young American soldier's struggle to find a new identity for himself as "a good soldier." Powerful visual imagery combines with raw language to create a vivid sense of atmosphere, while the play's structure and movement back and forth through time defines its meaning through juxtaposition, rather than straightforward narration.

In a bar in Vietnam, Pavlo struggles drunkenly to remain standing, as he talks ramblingly to a Vietnamese barmaid/prostitute (Yen, pronounced Ing) and another drunken soldier. He tells about a girl named, Joanna, that he was involved with, about how his mother wrote Joanna a letter calling her a "slut," and how he lost his temper when he found out.

A grenade is thrown into the room. "Pavlo drops to his knees, seizing the grenade, and has it in his hands" when there is the sound of an explosion, lights change, and Yen screams. In the silence following the explosion, Ardell appears, followed by two soldiers carrying a stretcher. As they remove the bodies of Yen and the other soldier, Ardell tells Pablo to get up. Pavlo jumps to his feet and reports to Ardell in traditional military fashion. He shouts out his name, rank and division. Ardell asks him about his family, and Pavlo reveals that he's got a mother and half brother. Ardell then asks whether Pavlo has killed and whether he enjoyed it, and Pavlo's answer to both questions is "yes."

Finally, Ardell asks what Pavlo was hit with, and where he was wounded. Pavlo describes the grenade, and realizes the explosion killed him. Ardell suggests that being dead makes Pavlo furious, and at first, Pavlo denies it. Then, he admits that he is angry and explains that when he picked up the grenade, he was thinking about throwing it away, remembering when he was eight-years-old and saw how amazingly the coach of a baseball team, visiting his home town, could throw.

A whistle blows loudly, and a squad of army recruits runs on. For a moment, Pavlo doesn't remember them, and Ardell reminds him it's his squad. Pavlo asks whether he's really dead, and Ardell says he's about to be. He then confirms with Pavlo that he's from New York, saying that now he knows who he's talking about, that if someone says the name "Pavlo Hummel," we'll know who is meant.

Act 1, Part 1 Analysis

The play's three central elements - style, character and theme - are introduced vividly and succinctly in this section. Plot is not included in this list for a reason, given that the play's essential purpose is to explore a situation through experience, rather than tell a straightforward story. This purpose is illustrated through the structure of its narrative,

which is composed not as a traditional, linear, plot-like series of incidents leading in logical progression from one to another, but more as a collage of impressions.

Scenes take place in different time frames, different places, and even on different planes of existence; such as Pavlo being alive or Pavlo being dead. This narrative structure is the key component of the play's style, a disjointed and fragmentary work in which, to use a familiar phrase, the whole is more than the sum of its parts. In other words, what we're watching is a theatrical collage, snapshots of life woven together to create a full picture.

At the center of all these events, defined and explored by the collage, is the character of Pavlo, a portrait of whom emerges as the collage is added to and shaped. Plenty of sides to him will be revealed as the play progresses, but the first to note at this early stage is his innocence, illustrated through his child-like bewilderment about his death, and his equally child-like belief that he could just throw the grenade away. An effective contrast to this side of his character is provided by his comment that he enjoys killing, with the question of why emerging later in the play, as a key fragment in the collage of his experiences.

A second noteworthy aspect to Pavlo is hinted at in his story about Joanna. When he refers to losing his temper after learning of what his mother did, it foreshadows other occasions in the play/collage in which he loses his temper. We see on those occasions how his eruption of anger was the result of feeling helpless, which means that we can extend this sense of helplessness as a trigger to this situation. In other words, his mother triggered a change in his relationship with Joanna. There was nothing he could do; therefore, he felt helpless and lost his temper. Eventually, as more aspects to the collage are added, we see how both aspects to his character, his innocence and his fear of helplessness, lead him to a re-definition of identity, a thematically relevant aspect to his story that emerges in the lines spoken by Ardell that conclude this first section.

Throughout the play, the question of what makes Pavlo who he is is repeatedly asked, answered and re-defined. As the collage takes shape, we see how Pavlo joined the army in order to define himself, a journey of discovery summed up in Ardell's line referring to knowing who Pavlo Hummel really is. In short, we begin with the ending - we see how Pavlo ends, with a defined identity as a dead soldier. The appearance of his basic training unit takes us to where he begins, the point where he has no real identity, and begins the sequence of scenes illustrating and defining his journey of discovery.

Act 1, Part 2

Act 1, Part 2 Summary

Pavlo falls in with his fellow trainees, as Sergeant Tower appears. In a series of long, aggressive, loudly delivered speeches, Tower harangues and belittles the trainees. He talks about how tough he is and how tough he's going to make them, about how the only thing lower in this world than a trainee is a civilian. From now on, every trainee's first name is the same as his, written over his heart - US Army. He sees Pavlo isn't paying attention, calls him out of the line, and orders him to do pushups. As he does, Tower harangues the trainees some more. When Pavlo finishes and stands, Tower chews him out for standing without being given permission and tells him to do ten more. Pavlo does as Tower harangues the trainees yet again, eventually leading them offstage, as they sing a marching song about how miserable life in the army is.

As the trainees are led off, two appear in the furnace room, Kress and Parker. Kress complains about how cold it is, and how crazy the rules of army life are. Meanwhile, Pavlo appears accompanied by Ardell, who tells him that wandering around the training camp without an apparent purpose is going to get him into trouble. At that moment, a Captain appears, notices Pavlo is wandering around, and orders him to do pushups. As Pavlo drops to the ground, Kress talks about how stupid Pavlo seems to be. Parker agrees, talking about how Pavlo volunteered for the job as fireman thinking it meant being a firefighter, when it fact it means tending the furnace all night.

Pierce, another trainee, jogs past Pavlo. Pavlo finds out that Pierce is going to the furnace room and accompanies him. When they get there, Kress teases Pierce about how he became squad leader, while Parker teases Pavlo about having no red fireman's hat. Kress talks disparagingly about how Pierce and Pavlo are both regular army, in for life. Pavlo says all he wants to know about is the gas chamber in the furnace room. Kress says Pavlo has his head up his ass, Pavlo tells him it's better than where he (Kress) has his head. Kress loses his temper, saying he can't handle being around weird people like Pavlo, shouting that the gas chamber is just the place where the gas that fuels the furnace is stored. He then complains again about being cold. Pavlo says he's been colder, Kress again loses his temper, and shouts about how he wishes Pavlo would shut up and die.

Parker wonders why Pavlo is so interested in the gas chamber, and Pavlo tells a long story about how he had an uncle executed in a gas chamber, because he killed four people in a fit of rage. He adds that he's been told he's got the same rage in his eyes as his uncle. He goes on to tell another long story about how he stole twenty-three cars, and how he narrowly missed getting caught. Parker and Kress go out to get their weapons and prepare for drill, saying they liked the story about the uncle better than the one about the cars.

When they're gone, Pavlo asks Pierce to listen to him recite his general orders. He starts from the first one, Pierce tells him to recite them more randomly, Pavlo says doing it randomly will mess him up, and Pierce tells him that all he really wants is to be told he's doing well, adding that he knows the stories Pavlo told were lies and asking whether he's got any pride. Pavlo says he's got lots of pride, that he wasn't lying but storytelling, and that he told the stories, because Kress and Parker were picking on him.

A whistle blows, calling them to formation. Pierce starts to go, but Pavlo stays, saying he's not going to stand around doing nothing, while he could be practicing drill. The whistle blows again, the other trainees gather, and Pierce tells Pavlo that he's no exception to the whistle, and that he's not going to be put up with being made to look bad. Pavlo says Pierce has obviously never heard of individual initiative, and then remains behind, as Pierce goes out. Tower appears to address the trainees, and Ardell ironically comments to Pavlo about how nobody knows whom they're dealing with when they're dealing with him.

As Tower inspects the other trainees, Ardell runs Pavlo through weapons drill. At first, Pavlo doesn't do well and curses at his rifle. He's getting better, just as Tower appears and demands to know what he's doing. Pavlo explains that he was practicing his drill, so he could be a good soldier. Tower asks whether he's lying to him or just plain stupid, speaks crudely about how Pavlo was probably masturbating, and says that as punishment, late at night, they'll do drill together and go on a cross country hike. Pavlo reminds him that he's got to take care of the furnace, but Tower says it doesn't matter, they'll do their drilling and hiking between Pavlo's shifts in the furnace room. Pavlo asks how many pushups Tower can do, saying he wants to be able to do just as many before leaving camp. Tower tells him to not ask questions like that, but then Pavlo asks another question - whether he was wrong to lie to his mother about what time his train was leaving, explaining that he didn't want her embarrassing him at the station. Tower goes out without answering, and then orders the other trainees to disperse. As they go, they sing a marching song about how unfaithful women are when their men are at war.

Act 1, Part 2 Analysis

The depths of Pavlo's innocence are vividly defined in this scene, as we see how little he knows about the facts of army life and about people. The former is the most obvious manifestation of his innocence, as Pavlo just doesn't seem to understand how the system that he's now a part of actually works. At the same time, his increasingly antagonistic relationship with the other soldiers, particularly Kress, illustrates how he seems to be innocent about how to read people, an aspect to his character that gets into further trouble later on - particularly in the moments just before his death.

The question at this point is whether Pavlo truly is as stupid as Kress thinks he is, or whether he just doesn't get it. The answer can be found in his response to the whistled call to formation and in his questioning of Tower. Both circumstances reveal that he wants to be a good soldier and is prepared to work hard to get there, but also reveal that he's unaware that he's supposed to do it the army way, as opposed to his own way.

This means he's not stupid, just napve. The rest of the play dramatizes how he's eventually taught that the army way is the only way, a process that plays an essential role in defining his identity.

More importantly in this section, we see just how desperate for an identity Pavlo is, embracing every opportunity to discover what being a good soldier means, opportunities that include practicing drill on his own and asking his sergeant inappropriate questions. What he discovers, the hard way, is the more appropriate means of achieving his goal. This aspect to his journey of discovery continues throughout the play, as Pavlo becomes more and more fixated on not just becoming a good soldier, which he eventually defines as a good killer, but the right kind of soldier/killer, one who becomes both experienced and joyful about it.

There are two ironic aspects to this. The first is that the Army, as represented by Tower, takes away a trainee's individuality, the "independence of thought," which we sense is a point of significant pride for Pavlo, and replaces it with the identity of a soldier. This is symbolized by Tower's reference to the first names of the trainees being changed to "US ARMY." This idea raises the question of whether, through telling the story of Pavlo Hummel, the play is making a thematic statement against the Army and against war, in general. This idea is developed further, as the collage continues to develop, and we see more negative aspects of both army life and war, not just in terms of Pavlo, but also in terms of the people and situations he encounters. This development climaxes in the play's final scene, in which Pavlo screams out that the Army is "shit."

The second irony related to Pavlo's claiming of a new identity is that, as we've already seen, at the end of that journey (when he grabs up the hand grenade) Pavlo's sense of innocence remains, to some degree, intact. This makes the secondary thematic point that no matter what someone does to try to re-define their identity, the core of who and what that person is doesn't change.

In terms of Pavlo's innocence about people, again, we see in this scene that his heart is in the right place. However, his ways and means of going about connecting with his fellow soldiers don't have anything to do with who they are. It's all about what he, Pavlo, feels and believes. His attitude is centered in the common enough desire to be liked, and respected, and above all seen as an individual with value. This is connected to his desire for an identity. If he's seen, for example, as someone with a colorful family or a colorful history, that defines him and gives him an identity.

Pavlo's lack of success in relationships, first indicated here and developed in several ways throughout the play, is perhaps another reason why he becomes so insistent upon becoming the right kind of killer. He needs to be seen as something by someone, whether that be seen as a friend by Kress, as a killer by the Vietnamese, or as a good lover by Yen. The second level to this desire to be liked and respected is that it's possible Pavlo believes that if he's respected, he won't be put in a position where he feels helpless. If people respect him, they'll take care of him.

The character of Ardell, whose name bears a passing visual resemblance to the word "angel," takes on an additional aspect in this scene. Whereas in the early scenes he seemed to be something of a guide, showing Pavlo both the way into death and the way into himself, in this scene he becomes a manifestation or externalization of Pavlo's inner drive to be a good soldier. This is illustrated by the way he drills Pavlo on the use of his weapon, and in later scenes, he performs similar instructional functions in similar circumstances. Other ways in which Ardell becomes an externalization of Pavlo's inner life appear throughout the play.

There are a couple of elements of foreshadowing in this section, both occurring relatively late and both involving the women in Pavlo's life. The first is the reference to his mother, which foreshadows what we learn later in the play about her apparent emotional instability. The second is in the reference to the faithless woman, an oblique reference to Joanna, whom Pavlo believes to have cheated on him in the same way as the woman in the song cheats.

Act 1, Part 3

Act 1, Part 3 Summary

Ardell instructs Pavlo on when to resort to bayonet combat, and how to put on his gas mask in the event of a gas attack. He reminds him that, in the event of a radiation attack, he's completely helpless. Pavlo, resenting the helplessness, repeats the word "no" over and over, moving into the next scene, as he does so.

Pavlo, still repeating the word "no," comes into the barracks where the other trainees are waiting to accuse him of stealing their money, and in particular the wallet of a trainee named "Hinkle." Pavlo says that he doesn't steal. When Kress reminds him about the cars he says he stole, Pavlo says that's different, because the people he stole the cars from weren't his friends. Kress says Pavlo has no friends, and then climbs onto Pavlo's bed. Pavlo tries to get him off, saying the bed's his. When Kress doesn't get off, Pavlo says he's going to sleep in Kress's, but Kress says that would not be a good idea, describing how in the middle of the night he might decide to go back to his own bed, wonder what Pavlo's doing there, imagine the worst, and beat him up. Pavlo rushes at him, shouting loudly and repeatedly for him to get off his bed.

Suddenly, there is the sound of gunfire. Tower appears, concluding weapons drill with a five mile run. The trainees run off at the beginning of the run, and a few moments later re-appear, exhausted and in pain at its end. Pavlo, even though he's as tired as the others, starts doing pushups. Kress shouts for him to stop, threatens him with violence, and taunts him about his lack of sexual experience. Pavlo says that Joanna gave him so much experience that his mother called her a slut. Kress calls him an idiot, Tower blows a whistle ordering them to get moving, Pavlo shouts for them all to get going, and runs off the stage. The other trainees follow.

As the trainees go, lights come up on another part of the stage representing a day room, or recreation hall. A Corporal and a soldier named, Hendrix, play pool as Tower orders Pavlo to clean the room up. When Pavlo comes in, the Corporal tells Hendrix that Pavlo has lots of money, but no chance to spend it and challenges Pavlo to a game. Pavlo agrees. As they play, conversation reveals that the Corporal has been in Vietnam, that Pavlo knows exactly where the town the Corporal refers to is, and that the Corporal is surprised Pavlo knows so much. The Corporal talks about how, if Pavlo is lucky, he'll be assigned to the infantry and about how easy it is to get laid in Vietnam.

The Corporal then tells a long story about how his commanding officer confronted a pair of Vietnamese, who seemed to be asking for help, but who were in fact wearing satchel charges - TNT packed in backpacks. As he wins the pool game, he tells Pavlo that the officer realized what was going on with the Vietnamese and shot them dead. When Pavlo asks how he knew, the Corporal just says that the officer had been around, and just knew. Hendrix speaks admiringly about how that's the way to be, and he and the

Corporal go out. As the action shifts back to the barracks, Pavlo comments on how important it is "just to see and to move; just to move."

Act 1, Part 3 Analysis

Two key components that make up the "collage" of Pavlo's character are defined in this scene. The first is a clear statement of his attitude towards helplessness, illustrated initially in his reaction to Ardell's reference to the helplessness of being attacked by radiation. His repeated "no's" indicate that such vulnerability is not something he's prepared to accept. The point is dramatized even more vividly through the confrontation with Kress, in which Pavlo is made helpless by Kress's refusal to move. Pavlo's reaction here is even stronger than his reaction to Ardell and verges on hysteria. This intensity of reaction gives us a very important clue as to what Pavlo's about - that he cannot and will not accept being helpless in any way, in any situation. If we accept this, we also have a clue about why becoming a good soldier is so important to him. Good soldiers are never helpless in any situation, at least in Pavlo's mind.

This idea is, in turn, borne out by the second key component to his character contained in this section, his reaction to the story of the confrontation between the officer and the Vietnamese. Later in the play, we see how hearing this story is a seminal experience for Pavlo, defining for him exactly what a good soldier is to the point where he hopes to be assigned to the infantry, and also to the point where he later does exactly the same thing as the officer, but without the same degree of experience. We see in that circumstance how he's so eager to appear to be a good solider and not helpless, that he neglects to become a good solider. At this point, though, all we know is that he's profoundly moved by the story, with his line after the Corporal and Hendrix leave suggesting that to him, helplessness can be conquered by the capacity to see, and to move. In other words, it's overcome by the capacity to decide and to act. It's a strength he strives to develop as the action of the play continues, a capacity challenged by the confrontation he faces at the beginning of the following scene.

Act 1, Part 4

Act 1, Part 4 Summary

Pavlo comes into the barracks, has a blanket thrown over him, is beaten and called thief. A whistle blows, and the attackers run out into formation. Pavlo comes out from the blanket and asks Ardell why he was attacked. Ardell tells him that sometimes people get pleasure out of hurting and destroying other people. At the same time, Tower instructs his men on how and why to use a bayonet, which he describes as having the spirit to kill.

Pavlo sees Pierce coming and grabs a book, pretending nothing's wrong. Pierce comes in, drunk out of his mind. He tells Pavlo that it's no fun being squad leader, saying he's worried about Pavlo. He wonders aloud how some of the strange things that happen to him actually happen and urges him to fight some of the people tormenting him. Pavlo tells him to go fuck himself, says his name is really Michael, not Pavlo, and that someday his father's going to apologize for running out on him. He then asks whether Pierce was one of the trainees who beat him up, and Pierce says he wasn't. As Pavlo remakes his bunk, Ardell comments that sometimes he looks inside Pavlo and can't believe what he's seeing, because it's so simple. He talks about how Pavlo is in so much pain, he can't see anything, inside himself or out in the world.

Tower shouts more instructions to the trainees learning to use their bayonets, telling them they have to want to hurt a man with them, feel the skin and muscle and bone come apart. He tells a story about how he surprised and shot a German during World War II, and then he and Ardell lead the trainees off to the same marching song they sang earlier about how miserable life in the army is.

Hinkle, Pierce, and other soldiers join Pavlo in the barracks. As several soldiers gamble with dice, conversation reveals that Pavlo has just told the story the Corporal told him about the two Vietnamese with the satchel packs, that he's determined to go infantry, and that his mother will be hugely excited when she hears. Further conversation reveals that the trainees have just taken a proficiency test and are waiting for the results. A soldier appears with the news that Tower is on his way with them. The dice are quickly put away, the trainees stand at attention, and Tower comes in with the news that only two soldiers, one of whom is Kress, have to repeat their basic training. The rest are going home, and will be assigned their duties later.

As the trainees celebrate, Pavlo says they all should let Kress know they sympathize with him for not making it through, adding that it must feel just about as awful as being wrapped in a blanket and being beaten up. Kress jumps on him, pushes him to the floor, twists his arm behind his back, and asks who in this room is a thief, has no friends, and passed his test by cheating. Pavlo calls for help from Pierce, who doesn't respond right away. Kress puts more pressure on Pavlo's arm, and Pavlo eventually cries out that "Hummel" is all the things Kress said.

Pierce breaks up the fight, Kress storms out, and Pavlo tries to run after him. Pierce holds him back, telling him forcefully that he needs to think before he speaks. Pavlo loses his temper, complaining about how slow Pierce was to act, how he (Pavlo) is never going to get anywhere he wants to go or be who he wants to be, and that he's probably going to end up a medic and not in the infantry. Pierce says angrily that Pavlo's perfectly happy where and how and what he is and goes out. Pavlo curses at them all and then rummages in his footlocker for a bottle of aspirin, as Ardell talks about how he knows how Pavlo feels, comparing his situation to jumping into a dark river of emptiness. Pavlo asks what it is that made the officer know to shoot the Vietnamese, and Ardell assures him that he'll know soon. Pavlo talks about wishing he could be bone, swallows the contents of the bottle of pills, and crawls under his blanket.

Tower speaks a long poetic speech about how the trainees can find their way when they're lost by finding the North Star, talking about how once they find it, they're not lost any more.

Act 1, Part 4 Analysis

Pavlo is made to feel helpless twice in this section, the first time as the result of the attack with the blanket, and the second time as the result of yet another confrontation with Kress. On the first occasion, his reaction is different. Not only does his temper not erupt, but he also seems to be genuinely puzzled and concerned about why the attack happened. This leads to confrontations with Ardell and Pierce, in which they both urge him to fight back, to find the spirit of killing that Tower refers to in his comments about the bayonet. This is a clear example of what might be described as "the collage effect," or the way meaning can be interpreted from the placement of two apparently unrelated scenes or incidents next to each other. In this case, the effect suggests the possibility that Pavlo's anger towards Kress and to the other people who've wounded him and made him feel helpless, is going to be sublimated in his desires and drives to be a good soldier, and to kill. This idea is further developed in the juxtaposition of Tower's weapons drill with Ardell's comments about Pavlo's pain, pain triggered not only by the actions and reactions of Kress, but those of other people. They, perhaps, include his father, whose betrayal is only mentioned in passing, but which clearly had a profoundly damaging effect.

This moment in the play, the point at which Tower incites the trainees to shout about their desire to kill, marks the beginning of an increase in energy, drive and momentum as the action advances towards the climax of the first act, the point at which Pavlo shouts out his identity as a solider. Another advance is made in the aftermath of Pavlo's comments about Kress' failure to pass his proficiency test. It could be argued that those comments are pointed and sarcastic, as angry in their way as Pavlo's shouting at Kress to get off his bed. The opposite argument could also be made - that Pavlo's sympathy is genuine, that in innocently offering compassion he's deliberately trying to make friends, and honestly can't understand why Kress reacts the way he does.

This would fit in with what we've seen of Pavlo's character before. He can become angry, but it doesn't seem to be in his nature to be that sarcastic, or vindictive. Kress's violent reaction is extremely important, in that he forces Pavlo to define his identity as a friendless, cheating thief. This is perhaps an even stronger trigger for Pavlo to lose his temper, stronger than the feeling of helplessness. Pavlo is so desperate to define himself as a soldier that, for Kress to define him as so much less, is completely infuriating and also completely depressing, causing Pavlo to try an commit suicide. As a result of what we see Pavlo doing with the pills, Tower's comments at the conclusion of this section, about lost trainees being able to find their way, become heavily ironic.

Pavlo's reference to his real name being Michael foreshadows the appearance at the beginning of the second act of his half brother, whose name happens to be Michael - or more specifically, Mickey. The fact that Pavlo claims the name as his own suggests that he's not happy with his own identity and would prefer to be someone else, particularly his brother. Finally, Pierce's comment that Pavlo is happy where he is seems puzzling at first glance. However, upon further consideration, it becomes possible to understand that Pierce sees Pavlo as liking to cause trouble, misinterpreting his innocent comments to Kress, for example, as deliberate attempts to antagonize him and make trouble. This is another way in which Pavlo's identity is defined for him by other people, and therefore is another incentive for him to define his identity for himself. We see again his desperation to do this through his despairing question to Ardell about how the officer who killed the Vietnamese knew what he knew, and through his suicide attempt. In Pavlo's mind, if he can't define himself as the perfect soldier, he'll define himself as dead.

Act 1, Part 5

Act 1, Part 5 Summary

Hinkle, Kress, Pierce and other trainees set up a poker game, making jokes about how Pavlo, still under his blanket, is probably masturbating. Hinkle discovers that Pavlo has been sniffing airplane glue and taken a whole bottle of aspirins. As the game continues and jokes are made about how stupid Pavlo is, Hinkle tries to get Pierce to do something. Pierce finally checks Pavlo out, realizes he's close to death, and orders Hinkle to fetch a medic. As Hinkle goes out, Kress tells him to bring him back a soda. Pierce and the other trainees lift Pavlo to his feet and get him moving as Ardell appears, commenting on the noise and fuss that's going to be made because of him. Pierce and the other trainees remove Pavlo's fatigues, leaving him in his underclothes as Ardell shouts at him to get up, get himself cleaned up, and put on his dress uniform. Pavlo seems unable to do anything for himself, so Ardell helps him dress, singing a marching song. Pierce and the other trainees also help Pavlo dress and then leave as Ardell tells Pavlo how good he looks, how everyone is going to think he looks great and is great, and how the person Pavlo sees in the mirror isn't just Pavlo Hummel anymore. Pavlo shouts out that he is "PAVLO MOTHERHUMPIN' HUMMEL," and lights snap to black.

Act 1, Part 5 Analysis

This scene, the climax of the first act, is a metaphoric externalization and dramatization of Pavlo's transformation into a soldier. Once again, Ardell appears as a manifestation of Pavlo's internal desire - an angel of will, to coin a better phrase - pulling him, literally and metaphorically, out of suicidal despair, dressing him in a new identity, removing him from the previously described dark river of emptiness and into the new life he's so clearly craved. In other words, Pavlo's determination is what pulls him back from the brink of death, determination personified by Ardell. At the end of this scene, we are confronted with the image of the good soldier that Pavlo wants to become, but what's interesting is that it's an external transformation only. Pavlo puts on the uniform, or more accurately has the uniform put on him, but as previously suggested and as dramatized in the second half of the play, he doesn't have the experience, the personality, or the passion to fill the uniform, to be a good soldier internally, as well. This image of superficial transformation, of soldier as uniform only, reiterates the thematic point about the dangers of the army and of war in general.

Act 2, Part 1

Act 2, Part 1 Summary

Pavlo is still in his dress uniform, the other trainees stand in formation, and Pavlo's brother Mickey is preparing for a date as a Captain tells the trainees about battles being fought in Vietnam. The trainees are dismissed as Pavlo joins Mickey, and they talk about how cold things were in Georgia. They also talk about their mother, who conversation reveals is in a psychiatric hospital. Pavlo talks about how the other men in his unit thought he was weird, but how Mickey is even weirder. Mickey wonders whether Pavlo really was in the army, suggesting he could have been lying like he always does. Pavlo insists that he was in the army, that he's going to Vietnam, and that "not an asshole anymore." He goes on to say that he's happier than he's ever been, and that people respect him now. He tells him how he earned the respect of Kress, who Pavlo says had an uncle executed for killing people, who fought him in the back of the barracks, and who suddenly stopped in the middle of the fight and hugged him. He finishes by saying that all the soldiers felt the same way about him, and that he's got a band of brothers now.

Mickey comments on how Pavlo wouldn't even exist if his (Mickey's) father hadn't died, meaning that their mother would never have met Pavlo's father, otherwise. Mickey refers to how many men their mother slept with, which leads Pavlo to ask whether Mickey has seen Joanna. Mickey tells him she got married, and that their mother said she was planning to write Pavlo a long letter. He then talks about the young girl he's going to see, the latest in a string of young women he's been getting lucky with. He then says their mother visits frequently, and Pavlo makes plans to call Joanna.

Mickey goes out as Ardell comes in and other soldiers appear, singing a marching song about how much they desire a beautiful woman. Pavlo takes off his uniform, complaining about how it doesn't get the reaction from girls he was hoping, about a particular girl who asked him how he felt about being a mindless robot, and saying that he feels like nothing out of the uniform, because he's done nothing in it.

Tower appears, addressing the trainees on the subject of how to treat a soldier wounded in the chest, going into graphic detail and concluding that the most important thing is helping the soldier breathe. He dismisses the men and then goes off, leaving Pavlo alone, drunk, and talking about how desperately he needs to get laid. He calls Joanna, speaking incoherently about a creature trapped inside him that he needs to let out. The woman on the other end of the phone reveals that she is, in fact, Joanna's mother. Pavlo speaks roughly to her, she hangs up, and Pavlo asks himself where Joanna is.

Lights immediately appear on Mrs. Hummel, who says Joanna is in Connecticut and probably pregnant. In a long speech that we understand to be taking place at least partly in Pavlo's imagination, Mrs. Hummel talks about her job in a department store,

how she became friends with a woman named, Sally, whose son had been killed in Vietnam, and how she reacted completely calmly when she heard. She speaks poetically about how a mother should be a tree and her children branches, and then says she knows and understands what Pavlo is trying to do.

Pavlo asks where his father is. Mrs. Hummel says that she told him everything about his father in a letter. Pavlo says he never got it. Mrs. Hummel talks about how his father was like all the soldiers that she took him to see in the movies, referring to a specific soldier who threw himself on a grenade. She goes on to say that she told him everything about his father when he was three. Pavlo calls her insane, and Mrs. Hummel says it's time for her to leave. Pavlo yells a story at her about how he picked up a girl in a bar, who wouldn't sleep with him, but who told him to call her when he got back from Vietnam. Mrs. Hummel disappears as Ardell comes, talking about how the best way for Pavlo to get laid is to walk around with dollar bills sticking out of his fly. An Officer appears, shouting out orders that include reference to Pavlo departing for Vietnam to take up duties as a medic.

Act 2, Part 1 Analysis

At the core of the collage of confrontations and confrontations in this section is a single image - that of Pavlo's emotional wound, first referred to in comments by Ardell at various points in Act 1, and referred to obliquely in this scene by Tower's instructions on how to treat a chest wound. This is another example of "the collage effect," in which the meaning of a group of scenes is a result of the way those scenes are put together, or juxtaposed. In this case, we can interpret the scenes around Tower's instructions about treating a chest wound as referring to a similar situation in Pavlo, although his wound is emotional rather than physical.

On another level, this particular collage effect can also be interpreted as indicating that the wound has something to do with the way Pavlo has always been dismissed by his family. We understand this from Pavlo's angry insistence that he's changed, which suggests that he now believes he's more worthy of their attention than he was before. We also see this in his family's reactions to him, how Mickey sees Pavlo as having nothing in common with him, how Pavlo's mother is too trapped in her own relationship with reality to take any real notice of him, and how his father is a stranger to him, literally and emotionally. This estrangement from his family is perhaps the core reason why Pavlo is so desperate for a new identity. He has no identity within his family; therefore, he needs to find another identity in another family. This idea is reinforced by the way he refers to his fellow trainees as "brothers."

The exact nature of Pavlo's wound is complicated. Helplessness is definitely part of it, given that a core component of all three relationships is that Pavlo is helpless to do anything to change them. He can't make his mother sane, he can't bring his father back, and he can't make his brother have things in common with him. There's also a great deal of loneliness there, as well as a desire for respect. Ultimately, however, it all boils down to a painful feeling of being not just unloved, but unvalued. Nobody at home wants

him, which is why Pavlo joined the army in the first place, to feel wanted. This is also why he creates the fiction that he's wanted by people in the army, not just the army itself. The army wants him in a way his family never did.

The transfer of the story about the killer uncle from Pavlo's family to Kress's notably embellishes this fiction. We see two things as a result of his story about Kress. Not only is Pavlo in fact a liar, but also on some level, lying is just a manifestation of Pavlo's desperation to belong somewhere, anywhere, and to have an identity that makes him welcome. His response to being rejected in the bar reiterates that point even more strongly, giving the impression that he believes that just, because he's wearing an army uniform, he really should be regarded as someone.

Also in that story is a reference to the play's anti-military perspective. This occurs in the comment that Pavlo says was made by the young woman about his being a robot, a suggestion that, in becoming a soldier, Pavlo has lost his independence of thought, spirit and action. The comment, and indeed the play, suggests that as a result of basic training and becoming a soldier, Pavlo and others like him have lost their connection with humanity.

An interesting moment in this scene occurs in Mrs. Hummel's reference to a movie in which a character died after falling on a grenade. The exact image in the speech is similar to the image from the beginning of the play, in which Pavlo picks up the grenade just before it explodes. This similarity suggests that Pavlo's ideals of what a soldier should be and is, are as unreal as those seen in the movies. This again makes the play's thematic point that, by substituting a military identity for his own, Pavlo is replacing one kind of emptiness with another, albeit a much more potentially deadly kind.

Act 2, Part 2

Act 2, Part 2 Summary

The action shifts to Vietnam, where a soldier named Jones pursues Yen in an attempt to get her to go to bed with him. At the same time, Brisbey, a soldier in a hospital bed, is shouting for Pavlo. Yen tells Jones that she's finished with him, as Pavlo appears and Brisbey tells him the story of how he stepped on a mine. It's a story that Ardell finishes by saying how Brisbey had both legs, his testicles and an arm blown off.

Pavlo is pulled by a young Vietnamese boy into the same bar as Jones. Mamasan, an elderly Vietnamese woman, offers Pavlo one of her many girls. Jones tells Pavlo that sex with a Vietnamese woman can be good, even if all she does is lie there. He says that it reminds a man he's alive. Jones calls Yen over, and when she joins them, he lifts her onto Pavlo's lap. As Yen flirts with Pavlo, Jones talks about how hot it is in Vietnam, saying Pavlo is automatically going to sweat in the same way as it's a given that he's going to get an STD from Yen. Yen and Pavlo exchange names, Mamasan and Jones bargain over how much time with Yen will cost, Jones pays Mamasan, and Yen leads Pavlo to bed.

As Yen undresses Pavlo, Tower appears and shouts instructions on how to handle a weapon, saying they have to love their rifles like they love their peckers. As trainees appear and drill, Pavlo makes love to Yen.

As Pavlo is finishing, Brisbey calls out to him, and Pavlo joins him. As Pavlo checks Brisbey's condition, Brisbey asks whether he can hold Pavlo's rifle, saying he likes the feel of rifles and weapons. Pavlo tells him "no," adds that he's got a visitor, and prepares a sedative as Wall, a sergeant from Brisbey's unit, appears. He and Brisbey talk about how Wall's no longer on the front line, but has been transferred to working on the supply line. They discuss how Brisbey's been trying to get Pavlo to help him kill himself, but Pavlo's refused. Brisbey dreams of pulling Wall's arm and legs off and using them for himself. Wall talks about how Brisbey is going to be heading home soon and about how he had the idea that, once they were both back home, they might get together. Brisbey makes a joke, Wall wonders whether he's ever serious, and Brisbey loses his temper and shouts for him to get out.

After Wall goes, Brisbey asks again to hold Pavlo's gun. Pavlo again refuses, and Brisbey calls him cruel. As Pavlo gives Brisbey the sedative, Brisbey says that if he did get hold of the rifle, he'd shoot Pavlo before he shot himself. He says that dying that way would be better than what the army would do to him for handing over the rifle. He then talks about how God is always doing things to human beings like He did to him, adding that humans got their revenge once, "nailing Him" in the same way that God has always nailed humanity.

Finally, in a long speech that begins with a reference to a fellow soldier whose hand was shot off and who crawled around on the ground looking for his fingers, Brisbey talks poetically about an explorer who tried to measure the depth of the ocean by dropping a robe over the side of his boat. In a clear metaphor for suicidal despair, he asks Pavlo how far from the end of the rope is the bottom. Pavlo tells Brisbey about the time he tried to kill himself and is now glad he didn't, because he's had good things happen to him, referring specifically to having had sex with Yen. He tries to assure Brisbey that good things are going to happen to him, too. However, before Brisbey can answer, a messenger appears with news that Captain Miller wants to see Pavlo.

Act 2, Part 2 Analysis

This section begins a series of increasingly wrenching scenes that adds several new perspectives to Pavlo's collage - specifically, his experiences in Vietnam of violence, sex, and increasingly aggressive confrontations with both death and fellow soldiers. The overall impression from this point on is that Pavlo struggles, with growing desperation, to reshape his life in the image that he wants it to be. He avoids seeing it and experiencing it for what it is - the brutal, animalistic, life-and-soul destroying process the play clearly wants us to see it as. What Pavlo wants to see is most effectively revealed in his response to Brisbey's request for the gun, which we understand almost immediately to actually be a request for help in killing himself. Pavlo's response indicates his belief that, ultimately, there is always the opportunity for good things to happen, even in circumstances as awful as Brisbey's.

Brisbey is the first of several confrontations Pavlo has with the harsh realities of war and army life. Our journey as audience members is the same as his, confronted with graphically portrayed images of how the bodies and perspectives of soldiers and civilians alike are mutilated beyond repair, even destroyed, by the way militaristic attitudes teach those willing to believe that violence is not a means to an end, but an end unto itself.

These mutilations include the obvious physical and spiritual injuries suffered by Brisbey, whose despairing desire for suicide echoes Pavlo's and foreshadows his death. They also include less obvious mutilations; such as, the way Pavlo's capacity for love is eventually amputated by his craving for sexual comfort, particularly the way he convinces himself that the pseudo-intimacy he experiences with Yen is as emotionally nourishing as he obviously wants it to be. At this point in the play, there are only hints of this, in Yen's treatment of him as just another soldier desperate for company. Later in the play, after his faith in the army and in himself are also disfigured, we see how much of his own need he projects onto her, in the same way as he projected his loneliness onto the army. In other words, we see how he needs to see her as a kind of savior, in the same way he needed to see the army.

Worthy of particular note here is the passing reference to Christ, who is never mentioned by name, but whose identity and sacrifice are evoked by Brisbey's reference to God being "nailed." There is the possibility that the idea of sacrifice arising from this

reference can be applied to Pavlo's situation, which can be seen as the sacrifice of individual identity in the name of a larger, "God-given" purpose.

Act 2, Part 3

Act 2, Part 3 Summary

Miller asks Pavlo why he wants to be transferred to the infantry, asking whether he thinks the work he does saving lives isn't important. Pavlo says he does see the importance of it, but that he'd be better off on the front lines. As Parham appears, in full combat gear and on patrol, Pavlo explains that he signed up to be a soldier and wants to be one more than anything. As he continues his explanation, Parham is caught in gunfire, wounded, and screaming for a medic. Miller reminds Pavlo that, if the enemy gets a chance, they will kill him, and asks whether he's got the strength to face it. In increasing agony, Parham calls again and again for help, as Pavlo says he does have the strength, and Miller agrees to his request for a transfer.

Lights change, Miller disappears, and Parham is left alone, begging specifically for Pavlo to save him, becoming delirious and imagining himself radioing for help. Two Vietnamese appear, gag him, and talk about how the US Army has bombed their villages. Parham realizes what they're about to do and reacts with terror, but is unable to defend himself as the Vietnamese stab him, rob him of his wallet and rifle, and run off.

Pavlo and another soldier named Ryan discover Parham's body. Pavlo decides to carry it away, and Ryan goes out, saying he's going to provide some cover. Then, as Pavlo lifts Parham's body, Ardell appears, wondering how many dead bodies this makes for Pavlo and saying Parham died badly. Pavlo says that this isn't bad at all, referring to carrying bodies that have been rotting in the sun for days. He talks about how excited he is about killing people, and about how people are going to think he's crazy for taking care of dead bodies, but how he knows those bodies are glad they're not going to be abandoned.

As Pavlo stands with Parham's body, one of the Vietnamese that killed Parham runs out and stabs him. Pavlo calls for Ryan, as Ardell talks in graphic, almost poetic language about what losing so much blood will do to him, and how human flesh is so frail that it tears. Ryan appears with another soldier and drags Pavlo off, as Pavlo, apparently delirious, shouts about how human beings tear.

Act 2, Part 3 Analysis

In this brief section, Pavlo is again confronted with a vivid reminder of how destructive war is. The juxtaposition here, between his enthusiasm for killing and the violence he encounters, in terms of what happens to Parham and what happens to him, dramatizes even more vividly the discrepancy between what he wants to see, and the reality in front of him. Pavlo is clearly embracing his newfound identity as "a perfect soldier" with all the energy, passion and commitment he can muster. We can just imagine how pleased Tower would be with him for doing so, and how pleased Pavlo would be that Tower is

pleased. At the same time, the reality facing Pavlo comes closer to home than ever, as he's stabbed by the Vietnamese. Worthy of particular note here is the way that Pavlo, as a result of the stabbing and also as a result of Ardell's comments on the stabbing, realizes just how frail flesh and blood are. He sees how far he truly is from being "bone," which is what he wished to be just before his suicide attempt near the end of Act 1.

Act 2, Part 4

Act 2, Part 4 Summary

Tower appears, talking to trainees about the strange things the trainees will see on duty, and how their job is to survive. He talks about how he saw one soldier, who had his rifle blown out of his hands, completely lose control. He again tells his story about the North Star, saying if you're lost, you can find the star and not be lost any more.

Pavlo appears, listening to Tower as if mesmerized and not paying attention when there's an explosion that knocks him to the ground. We learn later that Pavlo suffered shrapnel wounds in his back in this attack. Ardell reminds him that he's just human, asking angrily how many times Pavlo is going to let the enemy wound him. Pavlo shouts back that they can hurt him as many times as they want. Ardell calls him a fool, Pavlo tells him to shut up, and Ardell asks him how many times he's seen the North Star. Pavlo says he's seen a lot of people looking, joining Yen and trying to make love to her, as Ardell talks about wounds suffered by soldiers.

Pavlo lists several soldiers, who have been killed, saying it will never happen to him. Ardell reminds him that he's been wounded twice, but Pavlo says the wounds don't matter. Ardell says that after two wounds, he can go home. He then accuses Pavlo of wanting to stay. so he can kill just once more. Pavlo picks up his rifle and says that's exactly what he wants, because the enemy is still killing. Ardell comments sarcastically on how killing one more Vietnamese is really going to make up for all the other killing, talking specifically about how Pavlo killed an elderly farmer.

The scene to which Ardell is referring then plays out. Yen appears in the background, singing as an Elderly Vietnamese comes on. Ardell narrates, and Pavlo plays out, a scenario in which Pavlo comes to believe the Vietnamese is carrying satchel charges and shoots him, once in the abdomen, once in the foot, and once in the head. The scenario continues with Pavlo being shot by a sniper, and realizing that he wants out of the army. Ardell confronts him with the idea that, not only did he shoot the Elderly Vietnamese in the head, he metaphorically shot himself in the head, too. Pavlo shouts that everything Ardell says is bullshit, and Ardell leaves. Pavlo speaks deliriously about his memories of being twelve and looking down into the dark river, crawling towards Yen and talking incoherently about jumping into the river. He was struggling to get to the bottom, because he thought it was the way out. We understand this to be a metaphor for suicide.

An officer appears. Pavlo suddenly climbs to his feet and runs to him, requesting to be sent home on the grounds that he's been wounded three times and referring to a regulation that, if you've been wounded twice, you can be sent home. The officer tells him there's no such regulation, and that he's to report back to his unit.

Act 2, Part 4 Analysis

The line between delusion and reality in Pavlo's mind becomes increasingly blurred, as the action of this act unfolds. It peaks in the confrontation between him and Ardell, who functions here as a personification and externalization of that delusion, in the same way as he functioned previously as an externalization of Pavlo's determination to be a good soldier. This function is illustrated in the way Ardell tells Pavlo about the "wounded twice" regulation, which later turns out to be non-existent - a regulation Pavlo wants to believe in. This incident, combined with the shooting of the innocent Vietnamese in the same manner as the Vietnamese in the officer's story, illustrates how Pavlo is still trying to convince himself that reality is what he wants it to be, rather than what it is.

The argument could be made that these willful and continuous acts of denial spring from a classic tragic flaw. In the same way as classical characters of potential greatness like Oedipus, Hamlet or Macbeth are brought to destruction by flaws of character (pride, indecision or ambition), Pavlo is conceivably a character of potential greatness, deeply flawed by self-delusion. In short, in the same way that Hamlet dies as a result of his indecision, or Macbeth dies because of his ambition, Pavlo dies because he cannot and will not see himself or reality for what it truly is. The counter to this argument is that we never actually see Pavlo's greatness, not even a glimpse of it. In fact, from the beginning, he is portrayed as both loser and lost, defining his identity through the actions and example of other people. Does this make him any less tragic, or does his death portray him as the definitive victim? Ultimately, the answer to that question doesn't matter, because the play is saying that whether he has greatness in him or not, Pavlo is ultimately destroyed by a combination of circumstances, the internal factor of his own identity, and the external factor of the Army's willingness to exploit the lost-ness of people like "mother-humping" Pavlo Hummel.

Act 2, Part 5

Act 2, Part 5 Summary

Wall comes into the bar. Yen joins him, and they flirt, as Tower appears. He talks about what to do if they become a prisoner, and tells how the enemy can brainwash soldiers into turning against their buddies.

Pavlo comes into the bar and greets Mamasan, as Wall tries to convince Yen to sleep with him. Yen refuses, believing he's already married with several children. Pavlo interrupts, telling Wall that Yen is his girl, that he's anxious to be with her, and that Wall can have her when he's done. Wall tells Pavlo to leave Yen alone, and Pavlo says he's going to fuck her no matter what anyone says. Wall pulls a switchblade, and Pavlo kicks him in the groin. When Wall falls, Pavlo drags him to his feet and throws him out.

Tower appears, instructing the trainees about grenades, and the damage they can do. Meanwhile, Ardell appears, and Pavlo proudly talks about what he did to Wall. In the background, Wall prepares to throw a hand grenade, as Pavlo repeats his speech from the beginning of the play about how he lost his temper when he found out his mother had written the letter to Joanna. Wall throws the grenade, there is an explosion, and lights change. As soldiers retrieve Pavlo's body, Ardell tells us it took four days for Pavlo to die, and that in that time, he said nothing to anybody. He talks about how the body was left in the morgue and then shipped home, how Mrs. Hummell grieved, and Mickey didn't. Joanna became upset when she read the news of his death in the paper. He says that's about all the story he has to tell, and then uncovers Pavlo's body, asking if there's anything else he has to say and, in particular, whether he has any opinions about being regular army. Pavlo rises, and laughs a little with embarrassment. After some prompting from Ardell, he shouts repeatedly that it's all shit. His shouts eventually become a scream of rage and frustration.

Four soldiers enter with a coffin, which they place next to Pavlo. As they lower him into it, Pavlo suddenly realizes he's dead. Ardell talks about how, back home, everybody's comfortable, safe, and talking about how good it is to be home. He quietly leads Pavlo in the marching song about loving beautiful women, and then the marching song about how miserable life in the army is. Ardell closes the lid on the coffin, cutting Pavlo off. Ardell finishes the song with the closing line from the song about how women cheat - "Ain't no matter what you do ... Jody done it ... all to you." He then sings lines we haven't heard before, again to the rhythm of a marching song. "Lift your heads and lift 'em high ... Pavlo Hummel ... passing by."

Act 2, Part 5 Analysis

The play's anti-war message comes through loud and clear in several ways in this final section. First and foremost, it comes through in Pavlo's final, primal, despairing scream

that it's all shit - not life in general, but Army life in particular. The irony is that he's come to this conclusion after he's dead, and it's too late for him to do anything about it. He's also come to it after struggling one last desperate time to bend reality to his will, trying to take Yen from Wall and being blown to bits for his pains. That's something else he's realized is shit - the self-deluding way he's acted, felt and believed his entire life.

The anti-war message also manifests in Ardell's final song, in which "Jody" is clearly a metaphor for the army. In the same way that Jody "does" the man in the song, the army has messed Pavlo around, and ultimately destroyed him.

The image of the closed coffin is the final component of the play's collage, the last piece of the puzzle that once was Pavlo's life. It's a stark, visual summing up of the play's thematic warning; which is, that no matter what you see, hear and believe, at the core of the sense of identity promised by the army is a dead body.

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Characters

Ardell

An African American soldier in a "strangely unreal" uniform who functions as Pavlo's alter-ego throughout the play. Only Pavlo can see or hear Ardell, and Rabe uses the device of this character to depict Pavlo's extremely confused state of mind. Ardell moves in and out of the fragmented action, creating a mood of expressionism throughout the play. Ardell allows the audience a glimpse into Pavlo's interior character at crucial moments in the play; he also provides a point of transition between scenes. At the close of the first act, Ardell tells Pavlo, "Ain't doin' you no good you wish you dead, 'cause you ain't, man." Ardell transforms Pavlo by putting the latter in his dress uniform and sunglasses, preparing him for his trip home. Similarly, the play ends with Ardell and Pavlo having their final interaction As Pavlo is sealed in his coffin, Ardell prompts him to admit that in the end, the cause for and the circumstances under which he died are "all shit" Ardell slams Pavlo's coffin shut to conclude the play.

Sergeant Brisbey

A soldier at the field hospital in Vietnam who has been crippled by a land mine. He is extremely depressed about his condition and hints strongly that he wants to kill himself, asking Pavlo for a gun.

Burns

A trainee who plays craps with Pierce. He claims to have seen Pavlo steal from one of the other men. He and Kress are the two trainees who fail basic training.

The Corporal

Second in command of Pavlo's platoon, he leads the trainees in drills occasionally. Pavlo is envious of him because he has already seen combat in Vietnam.

Grennel

A soldier who serves in the field hospital with Pavlo.

Hendrix

A combat-seasoned soldier and therefore a person with some authority over the trainees. He is close to the Corporal and keeps lookout while the Corporal hustles Pavlo at pool.

Hinkle

A trainee; he speaks with a deep Southern drawl. It is his wallet that Pavlo is accused by the other men of stealing.

Mrs. Hummel

Pavlo and Mickey's mother; she suffers from mental illness. Mrs. Hummel's story about a co-worker learning of her son's death in Vietnam is a foreshadowing of Pavlo's own death; "I know what to expect," she says to Pavlo. Pavlo tries, unsuccessfully, to get his mother to reveal to him the identity of his father; Mrs. Hummel cannot understand why Pavlo doesn't remember her whispering his father's name to him when he was a child of three.

Michael Hummel

See Pavlo Hummel

Mickey Hummel

Pavlo's half-brother, considered weird, even by Pavlo's standards; Pavlo says of him that he "don't give a rat's ass for nothin' or nobody." The relationship between Pavlo and Mickey is somewhat strained; Mickey provokes Pavlo by refusing to believe he is in the army, and stating, "Vietnam don't even exist."

Pavlo Hummel

A teenager estranged from his family who seeks companionship and meaning in his life. Pavlo's desperate desire to belong cements his ties to the U.S. Army; he remains, however, a misfit who steals from his fellow soldiers and attempts suicide to get attention. Pavlo's confused state of mind is reflected in the play's expressionistic structure and in the characterization of Ardell, whom only Pavlo sees or hears. Pavlo wants to become a model soldier, but he is inept at his training. He sees himself as an effective fighting machine, but as Rabe points out in a note to the play, the only talent Pavlo reveals is "a talent for jumping into the fire." Seasoned by his experience in Vietnam, Pavlo becomes the kind of soldier who can brag, "I'm diggin' it man. Blowin'

people away. Cuttin' em down." This comment exemplifies a kind of character degeneration, a substitution for Pavlo's lack of meaningful human contact.

Jones

An American soldier Pavlo meets in Mamasan's brothel in Vietnam. More experienced not only at war but at sex, he facilitates Pavlo's first sexual encounters with the prostitute Yen. He provides Pavlo with an extremely frank introduction to Vietnam: "You gonna be here and you gonna sweat. And you gonna be here and you gonna get V.D.'"

Kress

A trainee, large and muscular,"with a constant manner of small confusion as if he feels always that something is going on that he nearly, but not quite, understands." He is from New Jersey and is unpleasantly surprised to be so cold all the time at the Georgia base. Kress is one of two trainees who fails basic training the first time, for which he holds a grudge against Pavlo. When Pavlo tells him "I feel sorry for you, Kress," he thinks Pavlo is taunting him, and he responds with a physical attack.

Mamasan

An older Vietnamese woman and keeper of the brothel where Pavlo meets his fate.

Captain Miller

Pavlo's commanding officer at the field hospital, who first attempts to talk Pavlo out of his request for a transfer, then grants the request. Pavlo shows him a lack of respect because he is an R.0 T.C. officer rather than "regular army." (There is also a Captain who addresses Pavlo's platoon at the end of basic training; the same actor plays all the officers.)

Jay Charles Johnson Parham

A young African American Private First Class who is wounded and cries for a medic, instead he is discovered by two Viet Cong who torture him for information, then kill him

Parker

A trainee, small, wears glasses. At first, he is somewhat more sympathetic to Pavlo than the other trainees; he tells Kress not to "knock that ole boy" because "Hummel's gonna keep us laughm'." Like the other men, however, Parker does not believe Pavlo when he denies having stolen from them.

Pierce

A trainee who acts as a squad leader. He is older than the other men in the squad and has a bit more life experience. While many of the trainees resent Pierce, Pavlo tries hard to please him. Pierce, meanwhile, likes Pavlo enough to try to keep him out of trouble with the other men.

Ryan

Pavlo's partner on patrol in the Vietnamese jungle

Mrs, Sorrenti.no

The mother of Pavlo's former girlfriend, Joanna; she appears only as a voice when Pavlo speaks to her on the phone. She hangs up on Pavlo because he is acting strangely and grows violent when he learns Joanna is unavailable.

Sergeant Tower

Pavlo's African American drill sergeant in boot camp, a tough officer who states "I am bigger than my name " Tower's name and military authority are also reflected in the drill sergeant's tower which dominates the play's set, giving him a literally central position in the play. Pavlo is fascinated by Tower, a near archetypal figure of masculine power who personifies the perfect solider in Pavlo's mind. Although Pavlo passes his basic training, however, he can never really live up to Tower's own standards and is constantly being reprimanded by the Sergeant

Sergeant Henry Wall

A friend and visitor of Brisbey's at the Vietnamese hospital, "middle-aged, gray-haired, chunky." His name somewhat describes his personality, as he is unmoved by Brisbey's shows of emotion Later, Wall is drunk and behaving lewdly in the brothel; he and Pavlo fight. Humiliated, Wall leaves the brothel and returns moments later, throwing the grenade that Mils Pavlo.

Yen

(Pronounced "Ing.") A Vietnamese girl who is a prostitute in Mamasan's brothel. Pavlo fights with Sergeant Wall over her and is killed as a result.

Themes

Change and Transformation

"I'm different than I was'" Pavlo brags to his half-brother, Mickey, during a visit home following his basic training. "I'm not the same anymore. I was an asshole. I'm not an asshole anymore." This somewhat desperate statement, however, proves to be much more an expression of desire than a statement of fact, as Pavlo demonstrates by lying to Mickey about being respected and liked among his fellow army trainees Pavlo does not succeed in developing meaningful human relationships, nor does he seem capable of learning from his mistakes. He is generally incapable of change, expressing self-awareness only symbolically in his conversations with Ardell after the grenade explodes.

Death

True to the theme of a protracted and bloody military conflict, death pervades every aspect of Rabe's play. Mrs. Hummel is obsessed with a story about a coworker learning of her son's death m Vietnam. Her comment "I know what to expect" is a foreshadowing of Pavlo's own death, but Pavlo is not engaged enough to respond to this warning nor to his mother's accusation "I know what you're trying to do." Indeed, Pavlo by this time has already attempted suicide, but in an almost offhanded way, only expressing abstractly to Ardell a desire to "be bone." Later, Pavlo may receive his first real intimations of mortality from attending to Sergeant Brisbey in the field hospital. Although Pavlo's enthusiasm for combat fades a bit each time he is wounded, he continues to act carelessly and is unprepared for the possibility of his own death. The struggle to comprehend violence and death remains a theme throughout Rabe's trilogy of Vietnam plays.

Duty and Responsibility

The theme of duty pervades *Pavlo Hummel.* Pavlo wants to serve well, to do his military duty, but in this pursuit he cannot stop himself from breaking the army's rules. It makes more sense to him, for example, to practice handling his rifle on his own, rather than respond to the whistle for company formation. Sgt. Tower is incredulous, saying Pavlo must be " awful stupid, because all the good soldiers is out there in that formation like they supposed to when they hear that whistle."

Pavlo does not understand that the primary duty of the soldier is to obey, that without this collective discipline, the men cannot depend on one another in combat. While Rabe has stressed repeatedly that *Pavlo Hummel* is not an anti-war play in the strictest sense, the conclusion of the play does challenge directly (at least in the context of Vietnam) the idea of war as a soldier's patriotic duty to his country As Pavlo is sealed in his coffin, Ardell prompts him to admit that in the end, the cause for and the circumstances under which he died are "all shit."

Human Condition

The play's perspective on the human condition is a fairly bleak one. The absurdity of human existence is highlighted strongly, especially by Sgt. Bnsbey who, for example, tells Pavlo about a soldier whose hand was blown off, "and he kept crawlin' round lookm' for his fingers. Couldn't go home without 'em, he said, he'd catch hell." Sgt. Brisbey's anecdote about the explorer Magellan symbolizes a central theme of the play: Magellan, according to Brisbey, wanted to know the depth of the ocean on which he was sailing, so he dropped a rope of two hundred feet over the side of his ship. "He thinks because all the rope he's got can't touch bottom, he's over the deepest part of the ocean. He doesn't know the real question. How far beyond all the rope you got is the bottom*?" This concept—the existential question of just how low a human being can sink, is also reflected in Pavlo's story about swimming in the Hudson River as a child, when he became disoriented and was fighting his way toward the bottom, thinking he was swimming upward In both of these images is also reflected the confusion of existence—not only do human beings suffer, but, much of the time, they also lack a basic understanding of their situation.

Revenge

The climax of the action in *Pavlo Hummel* is an act of revenge Sgt Wall throws the grenade which kills Pavlo, in revenge for having been beaten and humiliated by him in the Vietnamese brothel. An analogous scenario marks the end of the first act, when Kress attacks Pavlo because he thinks the latter is taunting him. As Pavlo continues to yell obscenities at Kress, Pierce intervenes "You gotta learn to think, Hummel.... You beat him; you had ole Kress beat and then you fixed it so you hadda lose. You went after him so he hadda be able to put you down " Thus, while there is no rational excuse for Sgt. Wall's brutal act of vengeance at the brothel, Pavlo is established as a character who often goes too far, pushing others into doing him harm. It is part of the complex psychology of his character, and of Rabe's play in general, that the audience is not allowed to perceive Pavlo as an unwitting victim of violence.

Rites of Passage

As a teenager estranged from his family and seeking companionship and meaning in his life, Pavlo has a desperate desire to belong; this need cements his ties to the U.S Army. Pavlo wants to become a model soldier, but he is inept at his training. He sees himself as an effective fighting machine, but he remains a misfit who steals from his fellow soldiers and attempts suicide to get attention. The army training as ante of passage is a journey to nowhere: the army has not fostered Pavlo's individuality nor his manhood—nor does it act as a surrogate family. The play suggests that those who look to an external institution to provide a rite of passage will ultimately be betrayed.

Style

Realism and Expressionism

While *Pavlo Hummel* struck audience members as a realistic portrayal of an American soldier's experience in Vietnam, this fact should not obscure the manner in which Rabe's play breaks from the form of theatrical realism. The interior dialogue between Ardell and Pavlo (continuing even after Pavlo's death) gives the play its psychological complexity, in a manner associated with expressionism (conversely, the psychology of characters in realism is revealed externally, through their actions) Rabe writes in his introduction to the play that it was primarily the influence of producer Joe Papp which caused him to refashion his essentially linear, realistic play during the course of rehearsal, giving it the expressionistic structure it was eventually to have (Rabe's career later moved more strongly toward realism).

Rabe has described in interviews his careful bridging of two styles, acknowledging that m *Pavlo Hummel* he "set up a framework in the play that *wasn't* realistic" but yet tried "to keep *Pavlo* as close to the facts... the graphicness of the events, as I could," (as he described his process in *Vietnam,We've All Been There).* Much of the realistic quality *Pavlo Hummel* does have is a reflection of Rabe's application of his own military experience onto the events and language of the play, Rabe's dramatic influences reflect his integration of varying theatrical styles: he calls Arthur Miller (author of *Death of a Salesman,* known for realistic plays on social issues) his favorite American playwright, but also acknowledges the influence of the Absurdist playwrights Eugene lonesco *(The Bald Prima Donna),* Jean Genet *{The Balcony),* and Samuel Beckett *{Wailingfor Godot).*

Plot Construction

Ultimately, Rabe's play achieves thematic unity not through telling **a** linear story from beginning to end but through the compk-x relationships which develop between scenes. Rather than simply building to Pavlo's death as a conclusion, the play stages the death twice, once at the very beginning and then repeated near the end. The audience thus knows Pavlo's death is inevitable and will watch the play-differently than they would if its plot depended more upon an element of suspense.

Writing of the relationship hetween scenes in the play. *Critical Quarterly's,* Richard Homan called Rabe's technique "collage," through which, for example, the playwright "suggests the incompatibility of Pavlo's military way of life with his civilian life through the juxtaposition of scenes and speeches from both lives in simultaneous settings." Beidler. writing in *American Literature and the Experience of Vietnam,* similarly identified a quality of Rabe's dramatic style that he called "pastiche," and he believed more strongly than Homan in its effectiveness; Beidler found the play "inexhaustible," "a collection of master images."

Characterization

Because the action of *Pavlo Hummel* does not unfold in **a** fully realistic or linear form, Rabe's characters are often seen as something other than real people. Homan commented that while effective, Rabe's collage' "allows only for personifications; character development and sustained dramatic conflict are impossible." Pavlo does have genuine complexity as a character, however, and many of Rabe's other portrayals —especially of the trainees and military characters like Sgt. Tower—are considered vivid and engaging. Edith Oliver was among the critics who found Rabe's characterizations to be a strength of his work, writing in the *New Yorker,* "For all its factual background, the play is not a documentary but a work of the imagination, and its drama, scene by scene, lies in what it reveals about the characters, whatever their circumstances."

Theatrical Space

Rabe's play makes use of multiple spaces on the stage with fluid changes between them and the interweaving and occasional overlapping of scenes. The sparse, abstract set design allows for rapid changes between scenes by merely suggesting different locales on different parts of the stage. The setting both facilitates the movement of scenes in Rabe's distinct dramatic structure and is itself an element of the play's expressionism. Dominating the sparse set, for example, is the drill sergeant's tower, which remains a pervasive image throughout the play (visible even during scenes set elsewhere than the boot camp).

Historical Context

Decades of civil conflict in Vietnam paved the way for the entanglement of the United States in the war in Indochina. Soon after the end of World War II, the guerrilla forces which had resisted Japan in the north turned their energies against the colonial power of France, the current occupying force in Vietnam. The Democratic Republic of Vietnam was established in Hanoi with Ho Chi Minh as president. In My, 1954, after years of escalating military conflict, the French and Ho's communist forces signed an agreement calling for an armistice and the temporary division of the country with French authority consolidated around Saigon in the southern half of the country. In 1963, southern military leaders, with the support of the U.S., overthrew the government of Ngo Dinh Diem.

The new military government that took Diem's place was weak, however, and by late 1964, South Vietnam was in virtual chaos. The administration of US. President Lyndon Johnson, fearing a total collapse of the Saigon regime, began to deploy American combat forces in the South in the hopes that a display of U.S. might would dissuade the communists from attempting to conquer South Vietnam. Hanoi, however (with support from the Soviet Union, China, and other socialist countries), stepped up their military campaign against the government of South Vietnam. In early 1968 Hanoi launched the Tet Offensive, a major series of attacks throughout the South. Though communist casualties were high, the offensive was a tactical success in that it made clear the might and commitment of the guerilla army. The Tet Offensive also succeeded in increasing antiwar sentiment in the United States and persuading President Johnson to halt further escalation of U.S. troop levels in South Vietnam,

By 1971, the gradual U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam accelerated with President Richard Nixon's announcement that the offensive combat role of American troops was at an end. The number of American soldiers in Vietnam had peaked at 543,000 in April, 1969; by January, 1972, the number was down to 139,000, and dropping steadily. American troops were also increasingly less involved in direct combat; while American war deaths had peaked at 14,592 for the year 1968, this number dropped to 1,380 for 1971. The withdrawal was part of the U.S. government's strategy of "Vietnamization"—that is, to return the military initiative to the South VietnamArmy. U.S. involvement in the war continued to be significant, however, particularly in the continuing bombing campaigns against the North and in the use of modern high-tech weapons (five of every six helicopter missions flown during 1971, for example, were piloted by Americans).

In 1971, the South undertook an ambitious campaign in the neighboring country of Laos. For some time, the communist forces had used this region as a staging area for attacks against the South; the southern initiative was an attempt to destroy the North Vietnamese supply routes along the Ho Chi Minh trail. Southern forces achieved some early victories, but as the campaign pushed farmer into Laos it stalled U.S. involvement in the effort remained selective; a base at Khe Sanh, for instance, was reactivated in January, 1971, to support the attack on Laos but was evacuated on April 6 of that year, a symbol of continuing U.S. disentanglement from the Indochina war.

The complexities of Cold War diplomacy remained a factor throughout the war in Vietnam. With President Nixon indicating a change in American policy towards China (a "thawing" of U.S. relations with that communist government), the North Vietnamese began to fear the possibility of an Indochina deal being made behind their back. China, however, hastened to state publicly that there was no question of its seeking a deal with the United States.

The Soviet Union, meanwhile, surpassed the United States as the global superpower, self-confi-dently increasing its military strength and political influence throughout the world (for example, signing new treaties with Egypt and India). America's belief in its need or ability to fulfill a global military role had been declining since it first realized it was unlikely to win the Vietnam war. This, combined with continuing domestic problems, resulted in a snowballing loss of national willpower.

At home in the United States, meanwhile, 1971 was a year of both success and failure for the peace movement. Peace leaders stressed that despite the withdrawal of American troops, the geographic scope of the Vietnam struggle had enlarged. American casualties might be replaced by South Vietnamese ones, they argued, but this fact did not alter the inherent immorality of the war. Two hundred thousand demonstrators attended an anti-war rally at the Capitol in Washington, D.C., while 156,000 people gathered for a similar demonstration in San Francisco. Additional groups continued to join the anti-war coalition, but the movement remained divided over strategy, with a split between those who simply protested U.S. participation in Vietnam and mainline peace organizations with a more inclusively pacifist strategy.

American society was rocked in 1971 by the actions of Daniel Ellsberg, a Defense Department analyst and consultant who had gradually changed his mind about the war while witnessing the failure of the "pacification" program in the Vietnamese countryside. Ellsberg released to the press a collection of "Pentagon Papers" documenting the decisions which led the U.S. into the Vietnam quagmire. As a result, he was indicted by a federal grand jury for unauthorized possession of national documents and later for the more serious charges of theft of government property and conspiracy. Publication of the documents, and news coverage of Ellsberg's case, fueled further protest against American involvement in Vietnam.

Critical Overview

Reviews of *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel* upon its opening were largely enthusiastic, commenting on both the play's artistry and Rabe's promise as an up and coming playwright. Edith Oliver, reviewing the play for the *New Yorker,* called it "an astonishing accomplishment." Clive Barnes of the *New York Times* acclaimed Rabe as a "new and authentic voice of our theatre." Similarly, George Oppenheimer of *Newsday* highlighted Rabe's "new and striking talent " Henry Hewes, summing up the 1971 theatrical season for the *Saturday Review,* called Rabe "possibly the most promising playwright" of the year. "[I]mmensely gifted" is how Charles Michener described Rabe in a *Newsweek* article

Pavlo Hummel has continued, since its initial production, to captivate many critics. In a 1982 article for the *New York Times,* Mel Gussow referred to the play as "searing." Philip Kolin, in his book *David Rabe- A Stage History and a Primary and Secondary Bibliography,* observed "As long as the spectre of Vietnam haunts us so will *Pavlo."*

Pavlo Hummel, however, has had its detractors. Walter Kerr's review for the *New York Times* was decidedly mixed, finding both promise and disappointment in the play Rabe's work, he wrote, "is like a current of air on a very hot night that teases us and then goes away. It lacks a discovery." Stanley Kauffmann found little significance in *Pavlo Hummel,* calling it "one more good-hearted sentimental undergraduate play about the horrors of war ... using stale expressionist fantasy and even staler rhetoric." To Kauffmann, the praise Rabe received was endemic of "professional yea-saying by theater critics" who lack "rigorous" judgment and refuse to write anything critical of the American theatre. Richard Homan was among critics who found that Rabe's "collage" technique merely renders characters as stereotypes or personifications; he called Rabe's treatment of his theme in *Pavlo Hummel* "crude." Similarly, Richard Watts of the *New York Post* found Rabe's title character a "ridiculous" creation and observed that "I felt Pavlo never really developed as a character."

Although critics differ in their assessments of the effectiveness of Rabe's dramatic technique, they are in stronger agreement that *Pavlo Hummel* was one of the first works of real significance regarding the American experience in Vietnam. Oliver wrote that Rabe's play "makes everything else I've seen on the subject seem skimpy and slightly false." *Newsweek's* Jack Kroll found *Pavlo Hummel* "the first play to deal successfully with the Vietnam War and the contemporary American army." Harold Clurman, writing in the *Nation,* referred to other theatrical portrayals of Vietnam as "commonplace," with their "sham stage hyperbole," but found that in *Pavlo Hummel'* 'the sense of real men at war is present." He commented: "It is the first play provoked by the Vietnam disaster which has made a real impression on me." Not finding Rabe's treatment as genuine as did Clurman, *Time's* Horace Judson, somewhat enigmatically, called the play "an antiwar cartoon, but a good one." Writing in his book *Uneasy Stages: A Chronicle of the New York Theatre, 1963-73,* John Simon found *Pavlo Hummel* "the best play about the war so far," but also criticized it, stating that it "often manages to stretch beyond the breaking point "

Pavlo Hummel, along with Rabe's other Vietnam plays, marked a transition from a time when the subject of Vietnam was, as Barbara Hurrell wrote, "considered box office poison." The success of Rabe's early plays considerably opened up the possibility for other writers and artists to treat seriously the painful experience of the Vietnam war. To Hurrell, however, much of the treatment of Vietnam appeared superficial; she observed that "it is not clear that the times are entirely receptive to such penetrating artistic inquiries as Rabe's trilogy." From Rabe's writing on Vietnam there is much to learn, Hurrell believed. The "shadows" cast by Rabe's characters, she commented, "are reminiscent of the plight of the nation itself, which m a self-destructive momentum devoid of acceptable goals, was embroiled in a war many did not accept as necessary, under conditions many did not accept as real."

Not surprisingly, critics of Rabe's work have continued to focus then: attention primarily on the lingering effect his plays have had upon American perceptions of the Vietnam experience. Beidler found that in Rabe's "trilogy" of Vietnam plays, "the principle of bring the war home evolved into a central thematic issue." The play brings home the Vietnam conflict "in the fullness of its commingled banality and terrifying waste." On this bewildering "landscape of death" Pavlo's basic training serves as existential metaphor; it is "the means whereby he learns, as the author notes, 'only that he is lost, now how, why, or even where.'" In his Vietnam plays, Richard Homan wrote, "Rabe chooses a situation in which the horror of violence can be juxtaposed with the assumptions of everyday life In the first two plays he tends to personify normal life in his civilian characters and the horror in his military characters with a resulting sense of ridicule toward both." Homan concluded that Rabe's Vietnam trilogy "illustrates that violence on a personal scale, or on a national scale through military involvement, is a way of evading what troubles us most."

Many critics have been pleased by the seeming absence of a strong ideological slant in Rabe's Vietnam plays. Catharine Hughes commented in *Plays, Politics, and Polemics* that "unlike most of those who have written antiwar plays, Rabe refuses to grind the axe, to present pure victims and pure monsters." Rather than appearing as anti-war propaganda, Rabe's plays seem to critics to be true to experience. Michener wrote in *Newsweek* that experience, "not ideology, is clearly the raotherlode for Rabe's writing. Faithfulness to experience is what gives his plays their bite—and their comic edge." Rabe has said that "I felt at the time that his rage and the rage of a lot of vets was such that they couldn't just come back and explain it; you had to make an experience of it somehow."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4

Critical Essay #1

Busiel is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Texas, Austin, specializing in modern drama and theatre. In this essay he discusses Rabe's play in the context of differing conceptions of what constitutes an "antiwar" play.

Although *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel* dramatizes the senseless death of a young man in Vietnam, David Rabe has emphasized repeatedly that he did not intend his play to be received as an "antiwar" work. Certainly, the play is critical of the reasons that countries engage in wars and that young men go to fight in them. Pavlo's enthusiasm for the military is drawn strongly into question, as Ardell forces him at the play's conclusion to confront the reason for his death:

ARDELL. You tell it to me: what you think of the cause' What you think a gettin' your ass blown clean off a freedom's frontier? What you think a bem' R A Regular Army lifer? PAVLO *{softly, with nearly embarrassed laughter)* Sheeeeee . ittttt Oh, lord . oh ..ARDELL: Ain't it what happened to you? Lemme hear itPAVLO Shit!,ARDELL And what you think a' all the "folks back home," saym' you a victim,.. you a' animal.. you a' fool".PAVLO: They shit!

This is strong commentary, punctuated by Ardell slamming shut the lid of Pavlo' s coffin. Significantly, though, Pavlo scorns not just "the cause" and the enthusiasm with which he (and many other young soldiers) went off to Vietnam but also the "folks back home" who might view Pavlo as a victim of American involvement in the war. This complex perspective is true to Rabe's own definition of *Pavlo Hummel* as something other than an antiwar play. The distinction for Rabe rests not so much on content as the intended result of a play, or any other work of art. Rabe has written in his introduction to *Two Plays* that "in my estimation, an 'antiwar' play is one that expects, by the very fabric of its executed conception, to have political effect."

Rabe not only rejects the idea that he intended his early Vietnam plays to have apolitical effect but more generally demes such a possibility for the theatre: "to think a play can have immediate, large-scale political effect is to overestimate vastly the powers that plays have." To Rabe, classifying his early plays as "antiwar" would serve only to narrow their impact to "the thin line of political tract," and thereby diminish their richness. Rabe believes that war is inevitably a permanent part of what he calls the "eternal human pageant," along with such elements as family, marriage, youth, and crime; therefore, the subject of war can (and should) be treated with as complex a perspective as these other topics."A play in which a family looks bad," Rabe explains, "is not called an 'antifamily' play."

When *Pavlo Hummel* premiered in 1971, the subject of Vietnam was, as B arbara Hurrell wrote in the *Journal of American Culture,* "considered box office poison." (Even two years later, after the tremendous success of Rabe's first two plays, CBS withdrew its support for the broadcast of a television version of Rabe's *Sticks and Bones,* fearing that audiences would find it offensive.) Writing about Vietnam was still largely the realm

of the journalist, as Robert Asahina observed in *Theatre:* "In the light of this apparent success of journalism in spearheading opposition to the war by making it 'more vivid' to the American public, it is scarcely surprising that conventional playwrights should have remained virtually silent about Vietnam."

When the American theatre did address the war, as in the Open Theatre presentation *Viet Rock,* it tended to be by "emptying] the stage of its literary content" (Asahina) in experimental, non-representational, and highly polemical productions. Rabe almost single-handedly broke this mold, opening up the possibility both for more complex treatments of Vietnam in the conventional theatre, and more broadly, for other writers and artists to treat seriously the painful experience of the Vietnam war The Vietnam-themed film work of writer/ director Oliver Stone *(Platoon, Born on the Fourth of July)* hardly seems possible without Rabe's innovations.

In the context of the American theatre's treatment of Vietnam, most critics found *Pavlo Hummel* astonishing, the first work of real significance regarding the American experience of the war. Harold Clurman, writing in the *Nation,* referred to other theatrical portrayals of Vietnam as "commonplace," with their "sham stage hyperbole," but he found that in *Pavlo Hummel* "the sense of real men at war is present." Clurman commented: "It is the first play provoked by the Vietnam disaster which has made a real impression on me." In the *New Yorker,* Edith Oliver wrote that Rabe's play "makes everything else I've seen on the subject seem skimpy and slightly false." *Newsweek's* Jack Kroll found *Pavlo Hummel*"the first play to deal successfully with the Vietnam War and the contemporary American army."

While critics seemingly responded merely to the literary quality of Rabe' s writing, the praise they heaped upon *Pavlo Hummel* nevertheless had political implications. In praising Rabe's play, the critics simultaneously rejected other theatrical treatments of Vietnam, specifically the more polemical, "antiwar," productions based on a belief that theatre *can* effect political change, or at least significantly alter political consciousness. Pleased by the seeming absence of a strong ideological slant in Rabe's Vietnam plays, Catharine Hughes commented in *Plays, Politics, and Polemics* that "unlike most of those who have written antiwar plays, Rabe refuses to grind the axe, to present pure victims and pure monsters."

The complexity of this perspective rests on the enigmatic character of Pavlo, who on the one hand accepts what he has been told about Vietnam (responding to the question "Soldier, what you think a the war?" with the simple reply: "It's being fought"), but on the other expresses a personal enthusiasm for his participation, which does not allow audiences to see him as a misled victim. "I'm diggin' it, man," he brags. "Blowin' people away. Cuttin "em down.. . It ain't no big thing."

Again, Rabe's rejection of the idea of an "antiwar" play stems from a lack of faith in theatre's ability to affect the course of society. He commented in an interview in *Vietnam, We've All Been There: Interviews with American Writers,* "The theater's expertise is not developed like the machinery of the media and the facility to use it. You just don't have the access—your ideas just don't reach the same numbers of people.

The tremendous amount of skill and brainpower that goes into advertising, and governmental advertising, is so huge that a play barely makes a bubble." But by reaching a mainstream audience in a well-respected off-Broadway theatre, Rabe certainly made a "bubble" larger than that made by the more experimental and polemical Vietnam productions. Rabe has allowed the label "confrontational" to be applied to his plays, and if they are not "antiwar" in a strict sense, they nevertheless forced audiences to confront a war far from home and remote in thought. In short, Rabe can be credited with "bringing the war home" to a sizable audience. Indeed, as Philip Beidler wrote of Rabe's "trilogy" of Vietnam plays in *American Literature and the Experience of Vietnam, '* 'the principle of bring the war home evolved into a central thematic issue."Rabe has recounted the need for this kind of intervention, drawing from his own personal experience. "Like Pavlo," he observed in *Vietnam, We've All Been There,* "at the time I was drafted, unless you were fairly politically astute, there was no war." In *Pavlo Hummel,* this perspective may be presented most clearly in Mickey, who taunts Pavlo, "Vietnam don't even exist." Upon his return from Vietnam, Rabe discovered a "tremendous indifference at home" that changed his entire perspective, forcing him "to view the whole thing as decadent, really corrupt." Another kind of awareness about Vietnam, equally disturbing to Rabe, was that of the politically active war protester.

As he told Robert Berkvist in the *New York Times,* "people kept trying to tell me what the war was about—they were the ones interested in debating the war but who didn't want to hear about the war itself. They weren't interested in any kind of evidence of, say, a Vietcong atrocity." In *Vietnam, We've All Been There,* Rabe commented that he "was against the war ultimately, but I was never comfortable with the antiwar movement." Thus, Rabe's writing on Vietnam trod a careful line, forcing audiences to confront the tragedy of a war to which many had not yet faced but challenging the politically aware to adopt a more complex perspective on America's involvement in Vietnam

Rabe told Berkvist, "All I'm trying to do is *define the event* for myself and for other people. I'm saying, in effect, 'This is what goes on,' and that's all." Certainly, Rabe's Vietnam plays served a very personal end, as writing did for so many Vietnam veterans, allowing them a means to address the repressed trauma of their experience. Rabe attempted to keep a journal during his military service in Vietnam but found that his experience there defied description, exceeding the capabilities of "language as mere symbol." He observed in *Vietnam, We've All Been There,* "you knew you were not going to get it; it was larger and bloodier than anything you were going to put down." To Rabe, this inability to represent in a realistic manner the full experience of Vietnam nullified the value of certain types of writing. Rabe has said that "I felt at the time that... the rage of a lot of vets was such that they couldn't just come back and explain it; you had to make an experience of it somehow "

Theatre, by its very nature a tangible, shared experience among performers and an audience, proved to be for Rabe the appropriate art form. He created in *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel* a theatrical event audiences and critics found truer to experience than the polemical "antiwar" plays which had preceded it. Rabe's play, therefore, might have lacked a kind of political impact, but it made a different kind of

impact through the perspective with which he addressed the experience and complex psychology of a soldier killed in Vietnam. The complexity of his first play ensured that years later, *Pavlo Hummel,* unlike *Viet Rock* and other works of the Vietnam era, has not faded from public memory. The play remains not just a significant work of the contemporary American theatre but specifically an enduring and complex examination of an unpopular war, the legacy of which still haunts American society.

Source: Christopher G Busiel, for *Drama for Students,* Gale, 1998

Critical Essay #2

Beidler discusses Rabe's "Vietnam Trilogy" (which also includes the plays Sticks and Bones *and* Streamers) *calling* The Basic Traimng of Pavel Hummel *"a mad pastiche of the American experience in Vietnam." The critic terms Rabe's contributions vital to literature concerning Vietnam.*

In the most important contributions to the dramatic literature of Vietnam during the period 1970-75— David Rabe's *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel* and *Sticks and Bones,* the first two plays in what, with the addition of *Streamers* in 1977, would become a major trilogy—the principle of bringing the war home evolved into a central thematic issue. Similarly ..., the attempt to explore the effects of Vietnam on actual American life would also come to suggest the degree to which the war's horror had been implicit in the American character from the outset, a collective tragedy waiting to happen, a prophetic curse hiding at the heart of a whole mythology of culture.The range and ambition of Rabe's endeavors are suggested in the two plays by the large formal challenges he poses for himself. In both *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel* and *Sticks and Bones,* he deals in visions of pure hackneyed Americana, opts for the mode of the almost oppressively quotidian and familiar. In the first, he works (as he will again in *Streamers)* the old American ground of boot camp and barracks, the world of *See Here, Private Hargrove* and *Sands of Iwo Jima* and *No Time for Sergeants,* and later on of Ernie Bilko and even Beetle Bailey. In the second, his broad-ranging debts to domestic and popular lore are equally evident. The blinded veteran, David, returns to his family, including Ozzie the father, Harriet the mother, and Rick the younger brother, who hops about with a snapshot camera and asks plenty of vaguely cute, witless questions. At issue in these plays, then, is not only the experience of Vietnam but also the nature of what passes for reality in America, and how the war is precisely the function of a culture holding fast, against a whole accumulation of geopolitical evidence to the contrary, to a sentimental, even banal complacency in some idiot sense of its own goodness and right.

The size of the risk is repaid again and again by the enduring quality of the accomplishment. *Pavlo Hummel* and *Sticks and Bones* bring the war home in all the immediacy of spectacle and even affront that modern drama in its greatest strength can produce. In these plays, like a sore or a boil or an encysted anger that can no longer be kept in. Vietnam spills its hot burden across the whole reach of our collective existence as a people.

Pavlo Hummel is a mad, inexhaustible pastiche of the American experience of Vietnam in the fullness of its commingled banality and terrifying waste. It is a collection of master images. The play opens with Pavlo in a Saigon bar. stinking, foul-mouthed, high-school drunk. ... Then, like all drunks feeling sorry for themselves in a strange place, he begins to tell the usual sad story, sloppy, stumbling persiflage about lost love and other conlidings.... Appropriately, just as he has begun to spill his guts in a figurative sense, a grenade is thrown into the bar, Pavlo gets his real chance. In an enactment of the worst fear of every GI in the war. he wakes up dead. . . . (pp. 112-14)

Afoot on the landscape of death, and accompanied by Ardell, the black comrade who serves as his slangy, irreverent GI Virgil, he now voyages in retrospect through the last stage of the American life that has eventually brought him to his moment of second-rate apotheosis. With him, we get to see the basic training as the *basic* training of Pavlo Hummel, the means whereby he learns, as the author notes. "only that he is lost, not how, why, or even where." If he has time to work up a talent, it is only the one he already has "for leaping into the fire."...

Source: Phillip D. Betdler, "In the Middle Range, 1970-75" in his *American Literature and the Experience ofVietnam,* University of Georgia Press, 1982, pp. 85-136.

Critical Essay #3

In this review of the play's original production, Hewes praises The Basic Training of Pavel Hummel *as an "impressively authentic" piece of theatre.*

At the Public's Newman Theatre, *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel* has been given a superb production by director Jeff Bleckner and a disciplined cast headed by William Atherton in the title role. The play is little more than a story told in flashbacks, in which we see Pavlo's basic training and his career in Vietnam. Although it tells us very little about Vietnam, it paints an impressively accurate picture of the military life and its pathetic waste of men and boys. The basic-training phase of the action features a jazzy first sergeant, nicely played by Joe Fields, who catches the ironic humor of an experienced soldier having fun dehumanizing recruits into reasonably efficient dogs with the conditioned reflexes that give them a chance for survival in a shooting war.

A second irony in the play is that Pavlo does survive the shooting, but eventually loses his life in a brothel. Here Pavlo encounters another soldier with the girl he wants, and instead of waiting his turn viciously attacks and humiliates his rival. The soldier responds by throwing a grenade into the brothel. There is a flaw in all this, because we are not able to connect Pavlo's sudden sadistic behavior with his Army experience And although the play includes a chorus character, the significance of the action, beyond a vague suggestion that war is a tragedy of meaningless accidents, fails to emerge. On the other hand, it might have required a wrenching of the material to make this important point clearer. And to wrench the material could have poisoned the honesty of this impressively authentic new play.

Source: Henry Hewes, review of *The Basic Training of Pavel Hummelm. Saturday Review,* VolumeLIV.no 28, July 10,1971, p. 36.

Critical Essay #4

Clurman reviews The Basic Training of Pavel Hummel's *original production, finding the work a* stirring representation of the war in Vietnam Beyond terming the play as "good" or "bad," the critic praised Rabe's work for creating a vivid impression of the horror of the war

I understood little more than half of what was spoken or shouted by the actors in David Rabe's, *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel* (Public Theater) . But though I gathered the impression that much of its text was well written, I was not troubled by missing so many of its lines. The pace had to be hectic, the scenes had to overlap, the sounds needed to be raucous: here was inferno

It is supposedly a simple matter to write or stage a play depicting the horrors of war. That is not so. People screaming in agony, bodies flung about, wounds inflicted, harsh words yapped, ruthless cruelty on all sides nearly always become commonplace and boring in the usual anti-war play or picture. They are piteous preachments thundered at us in sham stage hyperbole; we do not believe them. This is not the case with *Pavlo Hummel.* The staging is largely stylized (without artmess), the gunfire is not deafening, no blood spurts out from the injured, but the sense of real men at war is present We come to know the human abjectness of it all. It is haunting m its personal challenge.

Pavlo Hummel is a dumb kid who doesn't wish to go to war but once there he wants to fight it "like a man." He prefers combat duty to work as a hospital orderly He's a fool, almost crackers, an amalgam of the innocent vices and stupid virtues of the universal unknown GI. He's good-natured and atrocious. Around him are the other clumps of recognizable humanity, reduced to the point where they lose any identity except that of soldiers, food for slaughter, self-killers, ridiculous and terrible, victims who are also venomous War makes them so; they are totally immersed in a "planet" where everything has turned to filth.

The First Sergeant bellows a spiel of oaths and exhortations which are projected like bullets: they cause laughter and hurt. The phantomlike enemy is fierce and unfathomable. The savagery of "our" men is visited upon one another almost as much as on those of the opposite side. At the end of the play it is a shock and yet no surprise when we see that Pavlo Hummel has not been killed by an enemy raid but by a drunken U.S. sergeant who vied with Hummel over a girl inmate of a cat-house. The murder has nothing to do with the issues of the war, but much to do with war itself.

Is then *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel* a "good" play? The answer hardly concerned me. It strikes home as very few "better" plays do It is the first play provoked by the Vietnamese disaster which has made a real impression on me. The author, David Rabe, was there, and we are there with him. The large cast—notably William Atherton, Joe Fields, Albert Hall, Lee Wallace, Bob Legall— is excellent throughout in type and performance, and the direction by Jeff Bleckner has the right overall sweep and smash

and is often truly felt in detail. The setting by David Mitchell solves a knotty scenic problem with forceful simplicity.

Source: Harold Clurman, review of *The Basic Training of Pavel Hummel* in the *Nation,* Volume 212, no. 23, June 7, 1971,p 73

Adaptations

There are no media adaptations of *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel* available. Rabe' s two other well-known Vietnam plays, however, have been adapted *Sticks and Bones* was produced for CBS in 1972, although the network withdrew support for the play and left the choice of whether to air it or not to their affiliates. *Streamers* was made into a film in 1983, directed by Robert Altaian

Topics for Further Study

What is a conscientious objector? Research the experience of conscientious objectors during the Vietnam war; you might examine Gerald R. Gioglio's *Days of Decision: An Oral History of Conscientious Objectors in the Military during the Vietnam War* (Broken Rifle Press, 1988). Why does Sgt. Brisbey ask Pavlo in the hospital, "you're not a conscientious objector, are you? So you got a rifle." How does the perspective of a conscientious objector compare to Pavlo's feelings about the war, or, based on what you might know from other sources, to those of Rabe?

Many playgoers are surprised by the fact that Pavlo is not killed at the front but in a whorehouse after an argument that is ultimately meaningless. Research American casualties in the war, was it common for soldiers to be killed away from combat? What do the circumstances of Pavlo's death contribute to Rabe's depiction of the full experience of Vietnam?

Tragedy, in its classical form, usually involves some act of self-recognition on the part of the primary character near the play's conclusion. What, if anything, does Pavlo seem to learn as a character throughout the course of the play Compare his awareness while living to the symbolic dialogue he has with Ardell after his death.

Research perceptions of the Vietnam war at home in the United States and how they developed as the war progressed Consider Mickey's response to Pavlo's stories about basic training. What is the significance of Mickey's taunt, "Vietnam don't even exist'"?

Compare and Contrast

1971: Reintegradon into American society proves a difficult process for many Vietnam veterans. Denied the kind of celebration which marked the end of World War n, many American soldiers return from Vietnam with a great deal of shame, finding they have been rejected by their society. Many people who do not support U.S. involvement in Vietnam blame the soldiers who fought there for the tragedy of the war.

Today: While Vietnam veterans continue to struggle with such legacies of the war as unemployment, homelessness, and mental illness, Americans have more widely addressed the need to welcome vets back into the fold of society. A national monument erected in Washington, D.C., along with numerous parades and other events, have publicly acknowledged the sacrifice of American soldiers in Vietnam.

1971: Vietnam is the first "televised war," and the first in which the press operates practically free of external restraints. Television makes Vietnam more vivid to the American public—it is dubbed "the living room war"—with the result that it serves to fuel the growing opposition to the war.

Today: War, along with seemingly every other aspect of human existence, is ever-more rigorously documented by television and the other media. The Cable News Network (CNN) sets

new standards with their close coverage of the war in the Persian Gulf. Americans are thrilled by images of missile attacks and other high-tech military gadgetry; the media coverage fosters American public support for the war.

1971: The Vietnam war remains for the most part unaddressed in American literature, drama, and film, the topic is widely considered, as Barbara Hurrell wrote, "box office poison."

Today: Works like Rabe's *Pavlo Hummel* have created an opportunity for other writers and artists to address the war seriously and insightfully. A much wider body of art concerning the American experience in Vietnam has come into being in the last twenty-five years. Some of these works—like the fihns *The Deer Hunter, Coming Home, Apocalypse Now,* and *Platoon*—are widely considered American classics.

1971: Defense Department analyst Daniel Ells-berg releases the "Pentagon Papers" to the press, documenting the decisions which led the U.S. into the Vietnam quagmire. The publication of these secret papers fuels further protest against American involvement in Vietnam.

Today: While support for the U S. military has not necessarily decreased, a larger portion of the American people believe in their right to know more about the actions of their government.

What Do I Read Next?

Herr, Michael. *Dispatches* (1977). A highly personal, dramatic narrative, written by a journalist who was sent to Vietnam with the assignment of writing a monthly column from there. Eric Schroeder, in his book of interviews with American writers, *Vietnam, We've All Been There,* called it "the best book written about Vietnam"

Rabe's *Sticks and Bones* (1971), which focuses on the painful homecoming of David, a blinded and embittered Vietnam veteran David's family is unable to sympathize with his experience, a symbolic presentation by Rabe of American society's refusal to acknowledge the horrors of the war.

Rabe's *Streamers* (1976), considered by many critics to be Rabe's most accomplished play. It is often grouped together with Rabe's *Pavlo Hummel* and *Sticks and Bones* as his "Vietnam Trilogy." The entire play takes place in an army barracks where troops await transport to Vietnam. Three soldiers—two white, one black—have an uneasy camaraderie which is disrupted by the intrusion of a embittered black soldier, leading to the eruption of violence.

Eric Schroeder's *Vietnam, We've All Been There: Interviews with American Writers* (1992) takes its title from Michael Herr's *Dispatches,* highlighting how the Vietnam war, as Schroeder writes, "refused to remain a foreign conflict in a strange country far away; it came home in ways that we're still trying to work out." Included in the text, along with the chapter "David Rabe: 'A Harrowing Audience Experience,'" are interviews with novelists Norman Mailer and Robert Stone, poet Bruce Weigl, journalist/authors like John Sack, and others.

Further Study

Asahina, Robert. "The Basic Training of American Playwrights Theater and the Vietnam War" in *Theatre,* Vol 9, no 2, Spring, 1978, pp. 30-47.

This article places Rabe's "Vietnam Trilogy" m the context of other dramatic works concerning Vietnam Asahina feels that journalism controlled the public perception of the war and that dramatists of the era tended either to ignore it or to write strictly polemical plays against it He examines how Rabe's "Vietnam Trilogy" broke with this pattern and dealt with the war in more complex, artistic terms

Beidler, Philip D. *American Literature and the Experience of Vietnam,* University of Georgia Press (Athens), 1982

Beidler states his study is "about the literary ways in which people have tried to talk about an experience called Vietnam " Like other historians and critics, Beidler's interest m the Vietnam War includes its deep effects upon American culture at home, speaking of the soldiers who served there he says, "Ineluctably theirs, the experience of Vietnam would have to become ours " Finding that in Rabe's "trilogy" of Vietnam plays, "the principle ofbnng the war home evolved into a central thematic issue," Beidler calls Rabe's first two plays "the most important contributions to the dramatic literature of Vietnam during the period 1970-75."

Contemporary Literary Criticism, Gale, Vol. 4, 1975, Volume 8,1978, Volume 33,1985

This resource compiles selections of criticism, it is an excellent beginning point for a research paper about Rabe. The selections in these three volumes cover much of Rabe's playwntmg career with material on *Pavlo Hummel* contained in each of them.

Gilman, Owen W, Jr, Editor *America Rediscovered Critical Essays on Literature and Film of the Vietnam War,* Garland (New York), 1990

The essays in this collection, rather than focusing on individual authors, treat in depth a specific topic concerning literature and film of Vietnam. The essays include J T Hansen's "The Helicopter and the Punji Stick- Central Symbols of the Vietnam War," Marilyn Durham's "A Dual Perspective First-Person Narrative in Vietnam Film and Drama," and David J. DeRose's "Vietnam and Sexual Violence The Movie"

Hurrell, Barbara. "American Self-image in David Rabe's Vietnam Trilogy" in the *Journal of American Culture,* Vol. 4,1981, pp 95-107.

Hurrell stresses the importance of Rabe's early work in bringing the Vietnam war home to American audiences, making the subject of the war a legitimate one for writers and artists. She highlights the transformational role of Rabe's own Vietnam experience, for while his upbringing in Iowa "shaped Rabe's basic images of America, his experience m Vietnam added the other ingredients necessary to fuel the creative force behind the

Vietnam plays he later produced " Hurrell finds m all three of Rabe's Vietnam plays "exposition of the gulf between the self and the other as represented in the Vietnam conflict"

Kolin, Philip C. *David Rabe â ¢ A Stage History and a Primary and Secondary Bibliography,* Garland (New York), 1988

This minutely detailed resource contains a biography of Rabe and a stage history of his plays. It also lists more than 1300 writings by and about Rabe, with evaluative annotations of many of them The stage history of *Pavlo Hummel* is discussed on pp. 43-51.

Zmman, Toby Silverman, Editor. *David Rabe A Casebook,* Garland (New York), 1991

Contains a 1990 interview with Rabe and numerous other sources, including Deborah Geis's article "'Fighting to Get Down, Thinking It Was Up' A Narratological Reading of *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel.* "

Other Sources on the Vietnam War

Hundreds of book-length studies have been written about various aspects of America's involvement in the Vietnam War General studies include Maurice Isserman's *The Vietnam War* (Facts on File, 1992), John Devaney's *The Vietnam War* (F. Watts, 1992), RayBonds'sT/ie *Vietnam War The Illustrated History of the Conflict in Southeast Asia* (Crown, 1983), and Kathlyn Gay's *Vietnam War* (Twenty-First Century Books, 1996) Many books focus on the perspectives of individual soldiers who served m Vietnam, such as Kim Wilenson's *The Bad War An Oral History of the Vietnam War* (American Library, 1987), Al Santoh's *Everything We Had. An Oral History of the Vietnam War, by Thirty-Three American Soldiers Who Fought It* (Random House, 1981), and Kathryn Marshall's *In the Combat Zone- Vivid Personal Recollections of the Vietnam War from the Women Who Served There* (Penguin, 1988) Many of the book studies, like Rabe's *Sticks and Bones,* focus on the pain many American soldiers experienced during readjustment to home life, these include Steve Tnmm's *Walking Wounded: Men's Lives during and since the Vietnam War* (Ablex, 1993) and Richard Severn's *The Wages of War: When America's Soldiers Came Home, from Valley Forge to Vietnam* (Simon & Schuster, 1989) Other specialized studies include Daniel C Halhn's *The "Uncensored War" The Media and Vietnam* (Oxford University Press, 1986), Andrew Martin's *Receptions of War Vietnam in American Culture* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), and Wallace Terry's *Bloods- An Oral History of the Vietnam War, by Black Veterans* (Random House, 1984) In 1985, an international team of journalists and media professionals produced *Vietnam, a Television History,* a thirteen-part documentary on America's involvement in Vietnam It is widely available in libraries.

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David Galens

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Randy Bassett, Dean Dauphinais, Robert Duncan, Leitha Etheridge-Sims, Mary Grimes, Lezlie Light, Jeffrey Matlock, Dan Newell, Dave Oblender, Christine O'Bryan, Kelly A. Quin, Luke Rademacher, Robyn V. Young

Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

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For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of classic novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board memberseducational professionals helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

Editor, Drama for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535