The Deserter Study Guide

The Deserter by Norman Beim

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Introduction

Norman Beim's play *The Deserter* was first produced in the United States in 1978. The play was inspired by *The Execution of Private Slovik,* a 1974 book by William Bradford Huie. The book exposed the details of the execution of Private Eddie D. Slovik, the only American soldier executed for desertion during World War II. The play was also inspired by Beim's own experiences as an infantryman during World War II. Like the unnamed soldier in *The Deserter*, Beim also had qualms about killing enemy soldiers. Like many of Beim's dramatic works, *The Deserter* is a short play. Although the critics have not offered much commentary on the play, it earned first place in the 1978 Samuel French competition and continues to be produced throughout the United States.

The play's three main themes—desertion, cowardice, and religious beliefs during war—all combine to create a strong antiwar message. The soldier's descriptions of the horrors of war, coupled with his open and honest desire to survive and take care of his family, help to justify his actions and condemn war. The antiwar play was timely when it was first performed in 1978, since the United States had withdrawn from the unpopular Vietnam War only five years earlier. During the Vietnam War, various people organized a massive antiwar movement in the United States. During this movement, several American citizens were killed or wounded by American soldiers while trying to protest the war. A current copy of *The Deserter* can be found in *Six Award Winning Plays*.

Author Biography

Beim was born on October 2, 1923, in Newark, New Jersey. He attended Ohio State University (1941-1942), intending to be a novelist. However, Beim became interested in theater and began writing his first plays. He left school to serve in the United States Army Field Artillery from 1942 to 1945 during World War II. While he was fighting in Germany, he received second prize in the National Theatre Conference competition for his first one-act play, *Inside* (first produced in 1951). When he returned from the war, Beim continued writing but also worked as an actor to support himself. Beim was profoundly affected by his experiences in the war, which he explored in some of his plays, including *Inside* and *The Deserter* (1979). *The Deserter* won first prize in the prestigious Samuel French competition (1978). His other works include *My Family: The Jewish Immigrants* (1997), *Plays: At Home and Abroad* (1997), *Hymie and the Angel* (1998), and *Giants of the Old Testament* (2001).

Plot Summary

The Deserter starts out in a dark room in a European chateau, in early 1945. A soldier and a sergeant enter the room and have a long conversation, which comprises the first scene. As the conversation begins, the dialogue is cryptic, revealing details slowly. The sergeant says that the soldier has about an hour, so the soldier asks if he can write a letter. They discuss the soldier's criminal record, then wonder whether the soldier's wife will receive his pension after the soldier is killed by the firing squad. The soldier talks about his wife and the fact that they were just starting to get on their feet when the soldier got drafted. The sergeant talks with the soldier about his desertion and the soldier explains how he got separated from his military unit and tried to leave shortly after being reunited with it. The soldier asks if he can speak to a Catholic priest and the sergeant says that he will be able to soon. The sergeant finds some paper and a pen, and the soldier writes a long letter to his wife. In the letter, he tells her how he is being executed for desertion and notes that he would desert again if he had the chance, since the war is so horrible. He tells his wife to be strong and asks if she will occasionally write to his brother in prison.

The second scene begins when a Catholic priest, Father Murray, arrives and the sergeant leaves. The soldier tells Father Murray that he would like to confess, and the priest sets up an impromptu confessional. The soldier confesses to many sins, including his desertion. Father Murray asks him why he ran away, and the soldier says he was afraid. He also tells the priest that his brother is in prison because he was part of a robbery that ended in murder. Since that event, when the soldier's hometown priest, Father Hart, told him that all murder is wrong, the soldier has been unable to carry a gun. Father Murray tells the soldier that this is not true during war. Father Murray helps the soldier say an Our Father, a Hail Mary, and a Glory Be in penance for his sins, then gives the soldier a communion wafer. They discuss the particulars of the soldier's execution, then Father Murray tells the soldier to think about the paradise he is about to enter, not the quick death that will bring him there. The sergeant comes back to let them know it is time for the execution. The soldier and the priest walk outside, while the sergeant remains behind in the empty room and has a drink. A number of gunshots are heard before the curtain falls, signaling the death of the soldier.

Summary

On a winter morning in January 1945, a handcuffed soldier enters a room in a deserted French chateau. A Sergeant, armed with a rifle and a pistol, enters. He is carrying a candle. The furniture and windows are covered with dust cloths. The soldier asks for light, heat, paper and pencil. The Sergeant lights more candles, but he tells the soldier that it will be dawn soon and that they have only an hour to wait. They wait for a corporal who is supposed to bring paper and pencil. The Sergeant makes small talk by asking about the soldier's past crimes. The soldier admits to stealing a car in his youth.

The Sergeant accuses the soldier of expecting to get away with his most recent crime. The soldier replies that he never gets away with anything. He comments that he's worried about his wife because of her dizzy spells and diabetes. The Sergeant says that the soldier's wife will get his pension. The Soldier asks about the details of the firing squad. The Sergeant explains that he won't be one of the 12 on the squad. He says that one of the guns has a blank. The soldier voices his lost chances, like never getting to read all the books in the room. He says he misses the reformatory where he had time to read. He jokes that this assignment must not be much fun for the Sergeant. The Sergeant replies that in the Army, you do what you're told.

The soldier asks the Sergeant if he believes in heaven and hell. The Sergeant says he doesn't think about it much. The soldier, a Catholic, asks to be buried with his photo of his wife. The Sergeant comments that the wife is nice looking. The soldier rambles nervously about his wife being the most beautiful person he's ever known and how he'll miss going to the movies with her. He claims she changed his life, and that he was expecting to make it in life before he got drafted. He talks about a fortuneteller, who told him he would go on a long trip. The Sergeant says that fortune telling is a lot of crap.

The soldier blames his parents drove both he and his brother to steal out of hunger. The Sergeant argues that he didn't have to steal. The Sergeant asks the soldier why he didn't fight the Germans. The Soldier says he is sick. He can't do anything right. He is the crook who always gets caught. The Sergeant asks why he didn't shoot back at the Germans, when he had nothing to lose. The soldier says he couldn't shoot anyone and that he told his Captain, back in the States, that he couldn't shoot anyone.

The Sergeant asks if the soldier just walked away from his unit. The soldier and his buddy, he replies, got separated from their unit and met up with an English outfit. When they rejoined their unit, the soldier begged to be assigned anywhere where he wouldn't have to fire his rifle. The Captain assigned him to this company and the soldier left. When caught he didn't resist. The Sergeant, disgusted with the soldier's cowardice, teases "You thought they were gonna put you in the stockade and take care of you to the end of the war." The Soldier counters that no one else has been shot for desertion in this war or the last. He asks for a priest. He says he's Catholic even though his parents baptized him in the wrong church. He says he wanted to raise his children as Catholics; but then his wife got sick and they didn't have any kids. The Sergeant searches the room for some paper and pen, finds them and sets up a table for the soldier to write

upon. The Sergeant removes the handcuffs saying that he has to put them back on after the soldier is done writing. The soldier speaks as he writes.

In his letter, the soldier tells his wife about his crime and punishment, and that he doesn't regret it. He describes the horrors of seeing bodies along the road, and how war isn't like the movies show it. He encourages his wife to be patient with her family and move on with her life. He asks his wife to write to his brother in prison once in a while.

With no envelope, the soldier writes addresses on the back of the letter. Father Murray, the priest, arrives and dismisses the Sergeant for privacy. Father Murray sets up the table for last rites and settles in for the soldier's confession. The soldier hands him the letter. Father Murray promises to send it. The soldier confesses to missing Mass, masturbating, obscene talk, taking the Lord's name in vain and deserting his unit. Father Murray asks about the desertion. The soldier confesses to being a coward. Father Murray argues that if he loved his wife and country he would defend them. The soldier says that his parents drove him and his brother into crime, and that his brother went to prison for killing someone during a robbery. The soldier vowed never to use a gun. He also stated that Father Hart, at the reformatory, called murder a mortal sin.

Father Murray accuses the soldier of leaving his fellow soldiers at risk by shirking his responsibilities, and says "Freedom is something you have to fight for." The soldier repeats that Father Hart told him it is wrong to kill. Father Murray counters that, in war, you have to fight, or the enemy will destroy you. The soldier pleads that he is weak and cries. Father Murray admonishes him to go out to the firing squad bravely, and then he leads him through the Lord's Prayer. Father Murray gives communion. The soldier asks how the firing squad feels. Father Murray tells him that the men feel badly, but that it is their duty. The soldier forgives them and asks the priest to tell them that. Father Murray encourages the soldier to think about Paradise. The priest asks the soldier to say a prayer for him. The soldier promises he will.

The Sergeant returns. The soldier shakes his hand and Father Murray leads him out with a prayer. The Sergeant takes a swig of cognac from a bottle hidden in his jacket. He blows out the candles, gathers up the Priest's belongings and leaves. Shots are heard.

Analysis

The play is dedicated to the only soldier in WWII shot for desertion, Private Eddie Slovik. The great irony of the story is that, of the 60 million deaths attributed to the war, this one was done by American soldiers to an American soldier. This was not friendly fire, but a pointless example of the senseless waste of life in war. The execution took place on January 31, 1945 and the war ended on August 15, 1945.

The soldier, from beginning to end of the story, has no power to change his fate. In fact, he repeats that his life had been headed for disaster from the beginning. His parents baptize him in the wrong church. They drive him to stealing food. He always gets caught

when he does wrong. He goes to a reformatory. He steals a car. While his brother commits murder during a robbery, the soldier changes the direction of his life by marrying a good woman. Together they go to church and start to build decent lives, when he gets drafted. He refuses to shoot the enemy because he is convinced, through his brother's actions and by Father Hart at the reformatory, that murder is a mortal sin and will ruin his life. In fact, he is killed for refusing to kill.

The soldier is being executed for desertion - for not following orders. The Corporal, mentioned, at the beginning of the play, is supposed to return with pencil and paper; but he never appears. It is not clear whether he has deserted, is lost in the chateau or is recruited to be on the firing squad. He simply never appears.

Both the Sergeant and Father Murray harass the soldier for being a coward, for failing to follow orders and for bucking the order of things that they have accepted as necessary. The Sergeant lives by Army code, by orders and by the chain of command. He does whatever he is told without question. The Priest also lives by an orderly chain of command and rituals. The Priest justifies breaking one of the Ten Commandments because of duty to one's country, and to repay the debt of freedom enjoyed by Americans. Though both men grudgingly pity the soldier for being weak and stupid, they argue their beliefs about war in his last hour of life. It is as if they have to convince him, or themselves, of their position.

Symbols in this play: candles, weapons and figures of authority. The candles light the way into the dark room and are extinguished moments before the firing squad extinguishes a life. Like the soldier's life, the candles glow for a short while and then go out. The soldier's life and fate are examined under the light and found wanting. The Sergeant's weapons symbolize power. His rank means little in wartime without the weapons. His life is as fragile as the soldier's life. The difference between the men comes down to the willingness to value one's own life over the lives of others. The Sergeant believes his cause justifies his actions, though he seems somewhat conflicted about the soldier's execution. He drinks (possibly stolen cognac) to drown his doubts. The Sergeant and Father Murray symbolize allegiances to country and to God. Both chastise the soldier for failing to follow orders, and point out that his actions threaten the lives of others. Unspoken is their fear of what would happen if others deserted.

The major theme is the senselessness of war. The soldier describes the horror of passing bodies on the road and the chaos of battle. He is drafted against his will. He survives a few battles despite the fact that he doesn't fire back. When caught walking away from the battle a second time he is sentenced to die. Is he merely a coward or is he following his conviction that murder is a mortal sin? Perhaps he is too simple-minded to discern his own true motives because he feebly tries to defend his position. To the Sergeant he explains that he told his Captain stateside that he couldn't shoot. He told other officers that he couldn't shoot anyone, but he kept being assigned to the front lines. To Father Murray he pleads that Father Hart told him murder was a mortal sin and that there was no excuse for it. His words mean nothing in his final hour because his fate has been sealed. He dies as an example to others, that they must obey the order to

kill strangers. Oddly enough, he becomes one of the most famous soldiers to die, because his was the only completely avoidable death of the entire war.

Why didn't Father Murray offer the soldier wine during the final sacrament? He gave the soldier a wafer symbolizing the body of Christ, but he didn't give him wine for the blood of Christ. Did Father Murray consume the wine himself? Did he run out of it? It seems odd that in the midst of bloody conflict the priest would not have anything to symbolize Holy Blood. The wine is a vital part of the communion rite, so its absence appears meaningful.

Throughout the play, the soldier behaves passively. He submits to the authority of the Sergeant even after his handcuffs are removed. He is polite and shows no aggression. He is led to a room to await his death and remains sad, but calm. Like a sheep to slaughter, he follows the priest to the frozen garden to meet the firing squad. His life is sacrificed as an example that others should not defy authority, regardless of their personal beliefs or feelings. In the end the soldier followed orders.

Characters

Sergeant Garrel

Sergeant Garrel is the officer who is initially responsible for the soldier in the last hour before the soldier's execution. Garrel is referred to simply as "The Sergeant" in the printed play and is not named until the very end. Throughout the first scene, Garrel talks with the soldier about his desertion and about the factors that have caused the soldier to try to run away. Garrel has mixed feelings about the soldier. At several points in their conversation, Garrel tries to be tough. He is a company man and believes in doing what the army tells him to. He criticizes the soldier's weak behavior, first when the soldier cries and then when the soldier tells him the particulars of his desertion. Garrel says that if the soldier had tried to run away from Garrel's unit, the sergeant would have shot him immediately. However, Garrel does not hate the soldier; he just thinks the soldier is stupid for throwing away his life. In fact, when he is not criticizing the soldier's actions, Garrel asks the soldier questions to try to figure out why the soldier decided to run away.

Father Murray

Father Murray is the officer who takes responsibility for the soldier during the last half hour before the soldier's execution. Murray is referred to simply as "The Priest" in the printed play, although the soldier refers to him as "Father." Although Murray is a priest, he is also a military captain, so he outranks Sergeant Murray. Because of this, Garrel agrees to leave the soldier unshackled while Murray and the soldier have their conversation. Throughout this conversation, which comprises the second scene of the play, Murray takes the soldier's confession and gives him communion. Also, like the sergeant, the priest tries to ascertain why the soldier deserted his military unit. Although the soldier believes that murder of any kind is a mortal sin, Father Murray says that this is not true during war. Murray also criticizes the soldier for putting his fellow infantrymen in danger. Ultimately, however, Father Murray absolves the soldier of his sins and tells him to concentrate on the paradise that will follow his execution. Murray also asks the soldier to say a prayer for him once the soldier reaches heaven.

The Priest

See Father Murray

The Sergeant

See Sergeant Garrel

The Soldier

The unnamed soldier is executed for the crime of military desertion during World War II. Throughout the play, the soldier speaks with two officers, Sergeant Garrel and Father Murray. During these two conversations, the soldier reveals the reasons why he tried to run away from his military unit. The soldier, an ex-convict, had a rough childhood with alcoholic parents. He and his brother started stealing so that they could get something to eat and this developed into a regular career in crime. His brother ultimately went to prison for taking part in a fatal robbery while the soldier straightened up once he met his wife. Although they did not have much, the soldier and his wife both worked hard and were starting to make a good life together when the soldier got drafted. He tried to tell the military that he would not fight, but they did not listen. Ever since his brother's imprisonment, however, he has been unable to carry a gun and when he is on the battlefield, he is unable to fight. In addition, the soldier is afraid of being killed in battle and leaving his wife alone.

The soldier is a Catholic who gives his last confession to a Catholic priest, Father Murray. During his conversation with Murray, the soldier explains that he could not kill German soldiers because he believes that all killing is wrong. He learned this from his hometown priest, Father Hart. However, Father Murray says that killing is not a mortal sin during war. The soldier receives his last rites from Father Murray and goes to his death in peace, knowing that he will soon be in the afterlife. He does, however, feel bad for the rest of the soldiers who have to keep fighting the war and who must live with the anticipation that they may die at any moment.

Themes

Desertion

As the title of the play indicates, the main theme is desertion. The unnamed soldier, who was drafted into service in the war, tried to flee from his military unit when he saw an opportunity to do so. "We got separated from our outfit, this buddy of mine and me. We didn't know where they were, so we just joined this other outfit." The soldier briefly rejoins his military unit and tries to explain to his captain that he cannot fight, but the officer does not listen to him. The soldier says, "He told me I gotta stay there . . . and I left." Unfortunately, the soldier is caught and sentenced to be executed. This surprises him since, as the soldier notes, America does not generally execute its soldiers. The soldier says, "They ain't never shot anybody before. Not even in the last war." The sergeant notes, "You thought we were gonna put you in the stockade and take care of you to the end of the war. Didn't you?"

The sergeant and the priest, Father Murray, try to explain to the soldier why his crime of desertion deserves death. Although they approach the issue differently, both men essentially tell the soldier that by deserting his post, he is putting his entire military unit in danger of being killed by the Germans. The sergeant says, "I mean, you heard them shooting at you. They were out to kill you. If you were in my squad, I would have shot you right then and there." The sergeant is mad because the desertion of one soldier weakens the unit and can mean the difference between living and dying when fighting the Germans. Father Murray offers a similar assessment when he scolds the soldier. Father Murray says, "Did you ever think that they had to do your fighting for you? Did you ever think that some of them might be alive right now, if you had been fighting beside them?"

Cowardice

The sergeant assumes in the beginning that the soldier has deserted his military unit because he is a coward who is afraid of being killed. The sergeant says, "What was it then? I mean, everybody's scared. Anybody that's got any sense." When the soldier is talking to Father Murray, he confirms his cowardice. The soldier says, "I was afraid, Father. I was afraid of being shot." When the soldier explains how he did not run away after being recaptured by his military unit, the sergeant thinks he is even more of a coward. The sergeant says, "You didn't even have the guts to run away." However, while this fear plays a part in the soldier's decision to leave his military unit, the main reason is his fear of killing others. In his letter to his wife, the soldier describes the horrors that he has seen. Writes the soldier, "When we rolled into Germany the first day, I was sick and I've been sick ever since. There were bodies all along the road. It's not like in the movies."

Religious Beliefs versus Military Necessity

The soldier sees all of this carnage and refuses to fight, which is unacceptable in the military. As the sergeant notes, "In the army you do what you're told." Even Father Murray agrees with this: "In the army you're supposed to do as you're told. That's the only way an army can be run." However, the soldier sees a conflict between his religious beliefs and the military necessity that he kill others. The soldier's brother is serving time in prison for being an accomplice in a fatal robbery. After this crime happened, the soldier's priest back home, Father Hart, told him that all killing is wrong. The soldier says, "He said there was no excuse for killing anybody. Murder is murder, no matter what reason you had, and it was a mortal sin." As a result, the soldier has developed a mental block that prevents him from firing his rifle: "when we were attacked, something in me just froze, and I knew it was all wrong." Nevertheless, Father Murray says that murder is justified during wartime. The priest says, "This is war, boy. God doesn't want you to sit on your heels and let your enemy destroy you."

Style

One-Act Play

Most plays are divided into acts, major divisions of the play's dramatic action. In turn, acts are often divided into scenes. *The Deserter* is a one-act play, a unique dramatic structure. In one-act plays, the action takes place in one setting, whereas multi-act plays have the capability of changing the setting between acts. The action in one-act plays tends to be continuous and does not feature the same interruptions that often introduce scenes in multi-act plays. However, while the stage directions in the play do not call for any fade-outs or other stage techniques that normally indicate the arrival of a new scene, Beim does divide the action of his play into two distinct scenes. The first scene begins when the sergeant and the soldier walk into the room and begin their conversation. The second scene begins when the priest comes to relieve the sergeant and receive the soldier's confession.

Setting

The play takes place during the final months of World War II. The sergeant notes this fact at one point: "The war's almost over. A couple more months. That's all that's left." The fact that the soldier is executed so close to the end of a war that has already claimed the lives of countless American servicemen makes the soldier's death seem like even more of a waste. Since the Germans are almost beaten and the war is almost over, the soldier has a greater chance of surviving the fighting and returning home. However, his death sentence prevents this from happening. The action takes place during winter, which is also important to the play. Winter is traditionally associated with death, so it underscores the tragic qualities of the play. In addition, the deserted chateau where the play takes place seems death-like in its use of props, which include cloth-covered windows and furniture. These props give the setting a dark, dismal appearance, which further underscores the tragedy of the soldier's death.

Irony

Irony is the unique sense of awareness that is produced when someone says something and means another, or when somebody does something and the result is opposite of what was expected. *The Deserter*'s ending is an example of the second type, situational irony. While irony can often be used to comic effect, the ironic ending of *The Deserter* is grim. Throughout the story, the soldier talks about his inability to kill anybody, especially with a gun. In his letter to his wife, he notes, "As I told you, I would never fire my rifle, and I haven't." Later in the story, when he is talking to Father Murray, the soldier explains that he "used to carry a gun," but that he stopped doing this after his brother went to prison for being part of a fatal robbery. At this point, the soldier's hometown priest, Father Hart, tells him that all murder is a mortal sin. The soldier tells

Father Murray, "somehow I got it into my head that it was wrong to carry a gun." The soldier refuses to fight, and ultimately tries to run away. In the end, however, his efforts to avoid rifles and killing lead to his own death by firing squad—a highly ironic ending.

Historical Context

The Execution of Private Slovik

The play is based upon the actual execution of Private Eddie D. Slovik, the only American soldier to be executed for desertion during World War II. The execution of Private Slovik took place on January 31, 1945, during the final months of the war. As the soldier notes in Beim's play, "They ain't never shot anybody before. Not even in the last war. They ain't never shot anybody." The soldier, who is based on the real-life Slovik, is shocked that he is going to be killed for trying to avoid fighting. While this isolated event was shocking, soldiers in general had faced many other traumatic experiences during the war.

Infantrymen during World War II

World War II was a harrowing experience for soldiers on both sides of the conflict, but infantrymen often experienced the most emotional and physical anguish. Left out in the open on a battle-field, infantry troops had to dig foxholes to afford themselves some protection from other infantry, attacks by fighter planes, and other horrors. In the preface to his *Six Award Winning Plays*, Beim notes his own experiences as a young soldier fighting in the war. Beim says, "Trying to dig a foxhole in the frozen earth. Urinating in our helmets because it was too cold to get up. Wandering lost in the dark in the early hours of the morning." Many soldiers lived in a state of constant anticipation, never knowing when death might come to take them. As the soldier in Beim's play notes while being led off to his execution, he is finally at peace because he knows when he is going to die. However, he feels sorry for the other infantrymen who must continue to fight the war. The soldier says, "They'll never know when they're gonna get it. It was the waiting and the uncertainty that was the worst of it."

The Holocaust

In addition to the trauma of the battlefield, some soldiers witnessed unspeakable horrors when they liberated German concentration camps. These efficient death camps had been Nazi Germany's main tool for attempting to carry out a plan known as The Final Solution, an ethnic cleansing that was intended to wipe out European Jews. They nearly succeeded. In the concentration camps, Jews were shot, sent to gas chambers or otherwise murdered in large numbers. By the time Allied soldiers liberated the camps, Nazi Germany had systematically killed an estimated six million Jews—nearly two-thirds of the European Jewish population.

The Aftermath of the Vietnam War

During World War II, the United States government enjoyed widespread support from its citizens for its participation in World War II. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in Hawaii galvanized America to fight a war that was viewed as a fight against a deadly fascism that could overrun America. Hollywood also gave its support, as filmmakers, actors, and others in show business performed in and produced war propaganda films. However, this patriotic spirit did not permeate the Vietnam War, which sparked a huge antiwar movement. In 1978, when Beim first produced *The Deserter*, the effects of the Vietnam War (1965-1973) were still being felt by veterans. Vietnam claimed the lives of more than 55,000 American servicemen who fought a guerilla war in jungle conditions that were as harrowing as those faced by World War II soldiers. In addition to those killed, more than 150,000 American soldiers were wounded. However, these and other veterans did not get the welcome reception that World War II veterans had received. As Martin Gilbert notes in his book *A History of the Twentieth Century, Volume Three: 1952-1999,* "As the American public turned against the war, it also seemed to turn against the search for adequate provision for the veterans, for adequate recognition of what they had been through."

Critical Overview

One searches in vain to find much commentary on *The Deserter*. The lack of criticism may have something to do with the play's length; drama critics tend to reserve their comments for longer plays. In fact, this may explain why there is very little criticism on Beim, in general, since the majority of Beim's works are one or two-act plays. Many writers tend to address specific topics or themes in their body of work. Beim is no different in that several of his works address the Jewish immigrant experience.

However, this play, which concerns the execution of a Catholic soldier, is a departure from that theme. Despite this lack of commentary, the play did win first prize in the prestigious Samuel French competition (1978). Also, one can ascertain that the play has enjoyed a popular reception since its first performances in an off-off-Broadway production in 1978. As Beim notes in 1995 in the preface to his *Six Award Winning Plays*, "*The Deserter* continues to be produced around the country."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #1

Poquette has a bachelor's degree in English and specializes in writing about literature. In the following essay, Poquette discusses Beim's use of people, setting, and props in Beim's play to underscore the bleak message of war.

The Deserter is a depressing play. Within two scenes in one short act, the audience is introduced to a soldier, slowly realizes that this soldier is going to be shot for desertion, and then watches as the soldier is led off stage at the end to die. On the surface, this all appears very simple. In fact, Beim notes the simplicity of the plot in the notes on the play in the preface of his *Six Award Winning Plays*. Beim says, "Eddie Slovik, The Soldier, is brought to a deserted chateau in France by a guard, given his last rites by a priest and led off to his execution." Within this deceivingly simple premise, however, Beim carefully uses his characters' names, his setting, and his props to magnify the ominous mood created by the main character's impending death.

One of the first things that is noticeable about the play is that the soldier has no name. Although Beim admits that the character is based upon the real-life person, Eddie Slovik, the soldier is listed only as "The Soldier" in the printed cast of characters. In addition, the only two characters that the soldier comes in contact with, the sergeant and the priest, never refer to the soldier by name. For example, when the play starts, the soldier asks for a paper and pencil. The sergeant replies, "The Corporal went to get you some. You want something to eat?" For the rest of their discussion, the soldier is referred to only as "you." Likewise, when the priest arrives to give the soldier his last rites, he says to the sergeant, "I'd like to be alone with the prisoner." From this point on, the priest only refers to the soldier with terms like "you," "son," or "boy."

While one could argue that Beim does not use names because he is trying to keep his characters talking in an informal fashion, other clues in the story point to Beim's deliberate use of an anonymous identity for the soldier. Namely, the other two characters, the priest and the sergeant, both have names. When the priest first enters, he tells the sergeant, "I'm Father Murray." Also, even though the sergeant is not mentioned by name throughout most of the play, at the end the soldier reveals that he does know the sergeant's name. The soldier says, "Thank you, Sergeant Garrel." So why does Beim keep the doomed soldier anonymous? His impending death sentence wipes out the necessity for a name. The soldier, who had a name in life, is shortly going to be dead, so his name is not important. By making his soldier anonymous, however, Beim is also suggesting the anonymity of war, specifically the World War II of the setting and the Vietnam War that was recently over when he wrote the play. These two wars resulted in massive casualties, so many that it is sometimes hard to keep track of the names of the lost. This anonymity is one of the horrors of war that Beim hopes to underscore with his play. As a result, Beim uses the anonymity of his character to amplify the mood, or emotional quality, of the play.

Besides his deft use of character names, or lack of character names, Beim also underscores the deathly qualities of war through his setting. The play takes place in an

empty house, a deserted setting. Emptiness is also commonly used to suggest death, especially when the empty setting is one that should not be empty. In other words, the European country house that the characters are at has obviously been deserted. Given the circumstances of World War II, the inhabitants most likely fled from the Nazi terror or were killed before they could flee. In either case, the owners are long gone, casting an ominous feeling over the place. The coldness of the house underscores this idea. When the soldier and the sergeant first arrive, the soldier says he has a cold, and the sergeant tells him "there's no place to light a fire here." The soldier, however, points out the fireplace. The sergeant replies, "Well, there ain't no wood. Besides, we ain't gonna be here long, anyway." The fact that they are not even going to be there long enough to light a fire amplifies the mood of impending doom in the play. In addition, the lack of firewood, in a climate that is obviously prone to harsh winters, supports the idea that this house is a dead place that has not been used by anybody in a while.

The play takes place in winter, which is another deliberate move on Beim's part. The real-life Eddie Slovik was also shot in winter, so one could write this off as Beim being true to his historical material. However, just as Beim chose to make his soldier character anonymous for greater effect, he could also have chosen to set the play in a different season if it better suited his purpose. Setting the play in winter makes sense, given the dark mood of the play. The season of winter has strong symbolic meaning. A symbol is a physical object, action, or gesture that also represents an abstract concept, without losing its original identity. Winter is technically just the concrete amount of time that humans measure on a calendar to indicate the season. However, winter has long symbolized death, since it is the end of the natural cycle for many plant life and animals. Most trees lose their leaves in the fall and remain barren all winter. Certain animals hibernate in a death-like sleep during the winter season and, in general, the natural world appears to die, awaiting spring for its rebirth. Writers, philosophers, and others have traditionally made use of this natural cycle to associate winter with death. Since *The Deserter* has a grim mood that reflects the soldier's impending death, it makes sense that Beim chooses to keep the play set in winter.

Beim's choice of props also make sense. At first glance, it appears that the play uses very few props, which is true. However, each prop is used to great effect, further amplifying the grim mood of impending doom. Most of the major props are introduced right away. The first prop being sheets in the room. The stage notes indicate the following:

"*The furniture in the room and the French windows are covered with dust cloths."* Although it is early morning, these cloths on the windows render the room completely dark. In addition, the fact that the furniture is covered means that it has not been used in a while. This further underscores the idea that the house is a dead place that has not been used in a while. The sheet-covered furniture and windows are apparent to the audience even before the soldier and the sergeant enter.

When these two characters enter, the next two props, candles and guns, are introduced. Before the first candle is introduced, the room is completely dark. Darkness, like winter, is often used symbolically to suggest death. It appears that this is Beim's intent. The

stage notes indicate the following: "(*A SOLDIER enters the room, handcuffed and unarmed, followed by a SERGEANT, armed with a pistol and a rifle. The SERGEANT carries a lighted candle.*)" The fact that the soldier enters the room in complete darkness is significant because he is already marked for darkness or death. The sergeant, on the other hand, carries a source of light, which is often used symbolically to suggest death's opposite—life. Thus, the sergeant, who is not facing a death sentence is allowed to carry the symbol of life.

On a similar note, the sergeant's guns further underscore the idea of the soldier's impending death, since guns are used to take life. This is especially true since the soldier's execution is carried out by rifle. The sergeant's life-giving candle offers the soldier a brief reprieve—"About an hour," as the sergeant notes—but only long enough for the doomed soldier to write his letter to his wife. In fact, the soldier's letter is another major prop that is used to great effect. Throughout the first scene, Beim has had his soldier explain his reasons for deserting to the sergeant. In the process, the audience starts to feel sorry for the soldier. The letter helps amplify the audience's sympathy for the soldier. "There's only been one good thing in my life and that was you," writes the soldier. "I never thought I could be so happy on this earth. Your love has made everything worthwhile for me." The letter shows the soldier, a former criminal, to be a good man, who was finally getting his life back on track, but who now is going to be punished for doing what he believes was right. "I would do it again. This war is a terrible thing," writes the soldier. The letter is also important because it is the soldier's last. When his wife receives it, her husband will already be dead. Because of this, the letter, like the other props, amplifies the grim mood in the play.

In the end, even though Beim's play is short and simple in concept, it packs a lot of punch by creating a grim mood of impending death. Through its use of character names, setting and props, Beim hooks his audience and forces them to see the horrors of war, something that he experienced himself in World War II. In fact, like Eddie Slovik, and like the soldier character that Beim created to represent Slovik, Beim was unsure about the morality of his role in the war. Beim says in the preface to his *Six Award Winning Plays*, "I had qualms about bearing arms and killing my fellow man. 'Thou shalt not kill,' the Bible said. How ironic that morality can be twisted to suit the times." In his own time, with the Vietnam War just recently over, Beim wrote *The Deserter*, which ultimately uses a grim mood to make a statement about this twisting of morality that takes place during times of war.

Source: Ryan D. Poquette, Critical Essay on *The Deserter,* in *Drama for Students,* Gale, 2003.

Critical Essay #2

Brent holds a Ph.D. in American Culture from the University of Michigan and is a freelance writer and editor. In this essay, Brent asserts that Beim's play demonstrates the ways in which a variety of societal institutions have failed to accommodate the needs of the individual citizen.

Beim's one-act play *The Deserter* is set during the final months of World War II and concerns an American soldier who is about to be executed for deserting his unit and refusing to fire his gun at the enemy. With one hour to spare before the execution takes place, the soldier, as he is identified in the play, reveals much about his life history leading up to the act of desertion. He speaks first with the sergeant who keeps guard over him, and then with a military Catholic priest who is brought in to take his last confession. Based on the soldier's dialogue with these men, as well as the contents of the letter he writes to his wife, the reader is provided with enough information to piece together a basic outline of his life. Through this process of self-revelation, the soldier describes his encounters with various societal institutions, including the nuclear family, the economic system, the Catholic Church, the mass media, and the military. Beim thereby portrays a series of conflicts between the individual and society, as played out in the soldier's encounters with these institutions. In this condensed dramatic narrative, Beim demonstrates that the soldier's "crime" of desertion is the result, not of a character defect in the individual, but a failure of society to uphold a morally and ethically consistent system of values and to provide adequately for the needs of individual citizens. Beim thus implies that society has failed the individual through a system of faulty institutions.

The first societal institution encountered by the soldier is that of the nuclear family. Through the soldier's descriptions of his childhood and family life, Beim demonstrates the ways in which the institution of the family has failed to adequately provide for the well-being of the child. The soldier explains that his parents neglected and abused him and his brother when they were children. He tells the sergeant, "My parents were rotten. They were no good," adding, "they never cared about me or my brother." He later says that his parents used to drink and fight a lot. The soldier attributes his youthful criminal behavior to these failings on the part of his parents to properly raise and nurture him as a child. Through the soldier's account of his unfortunate childhood, Beim demonstrates that the societal institution of the nuclear family, purportedly responsible for the care and upbringing of children, fails to account for children whose parents are unwilling or unable to properly raise and nurture them.

The soldier's acts of theft while still a child are attributed to the failure of the economic system, as well as the failure of the nuclear family. He relates a series of robberies, arrests, and incarcerations undergone by himself and his brother. While he indicates that his acts of theft were partly due to neglect on the part of his parents, the soldier also implies that his parents were poor and did not have enough money to feed their children sufficiently. He explains that he and his brother were never adequately fed, as a direct result of which they committed their first acts of robbery. He tells the sergeant,

"My brother and I never used to have enough to eat. That's why we started stealing in the first place. Just to get something to eat." When the sergeant comments that there are other ways of obtaining food besides stealing (such as working to earn a living), the soldier responds by pointing out that, as a child, he was not in a position to earn his own living. Thus, the soldier's family background of poverty is demonstrated to be in part responsible for his criminal behavior. Beim thereby implies that a societal system of economic inequality and inadequate assistance for the poor, particularly for poor children, is largely to blame for the soldier's crimes.

The failure of the economic system to adequately address the needs of the individual is further indicated by the struggles of the soldier and his wife to maintain financial stability. The soldier tells the sergeant that he and his wife "ain't got nothing, and we both worked hard." This admission indicates that even those willing to work hard for their living often find that they are barely able to make ends meet. Further, their financial struggles are exacerbated when he is drafted into the army. He explains that they had finally earned enough money to get a nice apartment and plan to have a child when he got drafted. Because he was not paid enough by the army to maintain their moderate economic gains, his wife was unable to afford their apartment and had to move out. In addition, their furniture, which had not been fully paid for yet, was taken away from them. The failure of the economic system is further indicated by the soldier's concern about getting a military pension. He hopes that his wife will receive his military pension after he is executed but assumes that the nature of his crime will disqualify her for these benefits. Through these details of the soldier's financial concerns in regard to his wife, Beim indicates that the economic system often fails to ensure financial stability for many of its citizens. In addition, the economic system fails to account for people such as the soldier's wife, who is too ill to support herself financially without the assistance of her husband.

The soldier relates a series of encounters with the Catholic Church that had a strong effect on his life. As with the family and the economic system, it seems that the church failed to accommodate his individual circumstances in life. He explains that he and his wife were not allowed to get married in a Roman Catholic Church because his parents had baptized him in the wrong church. He comments that he does not know how it happened that his parents did this, but says that the priest refused to marry them because of it. In this instance, the soldier was again failed by his family in ways that were completely beyond his control. He asserts that he has always been a Catholic and that his wife, though not a Catholic, had attended Catholic church with him and agreed to provide their children with a Catholic upbringing. The refusal of the priest to marry them, despite the soldier's deep religious faith and genuine efforts to live up to the ideals of the church, indicates an institution that places rigid institutional policies above the specific circumstances of the individual.

As well as the failure of the nuclear family, the economic system, and the church to adequately address the needs of the individual, the soldier indicates that even the institution of the mass media failed to adequately prepare him for the realities of war. He comments that he and his wife used to go out to the movies several times a week, and that these movies misrepresented the experience of war. In the letter to his wife, the

soldier tells her "This war is a terrible thing." He describes the dead bodies strewn along the road when the Allied troops first rolled into Germany, asserting "It's not like in the movies, I'll tell you that." The soldier further comments to the sergeant that, in movies, a man who is about to be executed is always granted a pardon at the last moment and allowed to live. He realizes, however, that this is not something he can hope for in reality, observing, "I guess it's too late for any kind of pardon." By indicating the discrepancy between representations of war in movies and the realities of war, Beim suggests that society fails to provide its citizens with a realistic understanding of war.

In addition to the aforementioned institutions, *The Deserter* explores the ways in which military policy is often in conflict with the concerns of the individual citizen. The soldier fully admits to having failed to fire his gun at the enemy and deserted his unit to avoid participating in combat. But, he struggles in the last hour of his life with conflicts between the values he has been taught by the Catholic Church and those of the military. His deeply held religious values are in conflict with the requirements made upon him by the military. He explains to the sergeant and to the military priest that a priest by the name of Father Hart taught him that killing another human being is wrong, regardless of the circumstance. The military priest contradicts this message when he tells the soldier that God does not want his enemies to win the war, and that, therefore, it is his duty to God and country to obey the commands of his military superiors. The soldier repeatedly asserts that he is confused by these conflicting messages. Beim contrasts the teaching of one priest, Father Hart, with those of the military priest to demonstrate the failure of both the church and the military to present a consistent system of values and morals according to which the individual citizen may live.

Despite his difficult childhood, the soldier maintains a strong system of personal values by which he tries to live. This system of values includes a strong work ethic, loyalty to loved ones, compassion for other people, religious faith, and a prohibition against killing. The soldier's strong work ethic is indicated by his efforts to work hard so that he and his wife can afford to have a child and support a family. Because of his strong sense of loyalty to his wife, he expresses the utmost concern for her financial, physical, and emotional well being, even as he is being lead off to his own death. His sense of compassion for other people is demonstrated through his sympathy for the sergeant given the unpleasant task of guarding a condemned man, as well as for the twelve men on the firing squad whose duty it is to execute him. His deeply held belief that killing is wrong prevents him from shooting his gun at the German soldiers. The soldier's Catholic faith remains strong throughout his life, and his last moments are devoted to making a final confession to a Catholic priest before being lead off to execution.

Through the character of the soldier, Beim thus demonstrates that the values of the individual, even when noble, are often in conflict with the dictates of societal institutions. In the final moments before his execution, the soldier comes to an understanding that he is being executed as a means of making an example to warn other soldiers against desertion. He comments to the priest, "I guess they had to make an example of someone and I am an excon, so why not me?" Beim here suggests that the execution of the soldier represents a failure of society to provide adequate opportunities for individual citizens.

Source: Liz Brent, Critical Essay on *The Deserter,* in *Drama for Students,* Gale, 2003.

Topics for Further Study

Research other American soldiers who have deserted their military units in any of the major American wars. Compare the soldiers' reasons for desertion and their punishment to those of the soldier in *The Deserter*.

Research the current methods used in the United States to boost morale and prevent desertions. Imagine that you are an American soldier in the army during any of the major wars in which the United States has participated. Write a journal entry that describes your typical day, using your research to support your ideas.

Research any accounts of German soldiers who deserted their military units in World War II. Discuss the reasons behind these desertions and any punishment that these soldiers received. If you can find no accounts of German desertions, discuss possible reasons why.

Research the number of casualties from the major battles of World War II. Plot the casualty numbers for each of these battles on a large map of the world and write a short description of each battle.

In the play, the soldier writes to his wife, telling her she should try to get access to his pension money, if she can. Research the average pension of an army private during World War II, and compare this to the average pension of an army private today. Use an economical table to convert the dollar amount of the 1945 pension to a current dollar value. Discuss the reasons behind any difference in the values of the pensions.

Compare and Contrast

1945: The United States enters World Wart II, joining England and the Soviet Union against Germany, Italy, and Japan.

Late 1970s: The Cold War develops between the United States and the Soviet Union. Although much of the Cold War period is technically spent in peacetime, the pervasive feeling of suspicion and paranoia generated by this clash of superpowers make many in the United States feel as if they are fighting a war.

Today: Many countries are involved in the war on terrorism. Following attacks on New York and Washington in 2001, many American citizens become suspicious and wary of terrorist attacks.

1945: Many American men are drafted into military service during World War II. For the most part, these men are willing to serve their country against the threat of fascism.

Late 1970s: Following the extremely unpopular Vietnam War, in which many American men try to fight or avoid the draft, the selective service system, which provides the administrative infrastructure for the draft is abolished.

Today: The selective service system exists once again to provide the government with extra military forces, if needed. However, the United States military today relies on a smaller standing army with a large force of volunteer reserves who can be called to active duty, if necessary.

1945: American soldiers return from World War II as heroes. However, some experience a psychological condition known as shell shock, which results from being in a constant state of anticipation of being killed in battle.

Late 1970s: Many American veterans are shunned for their role in fighting the Vietnam War. This negative atmosphere, in addition to shell shock—now known as combat fatigue—helps to create behavioral and drug-abuse problems among many Vietnam veterans.

Today: American soldiers returning from their battles in Afghanistan are watched closely by the Pentagon, which has instituted a comprehensive support program for helping veterans transition back to civilian life.

What Do I Read Next?

Beim's novel *Hymie and the Angel* (1998) also has a religious theme, although this work deals with Judaism, not Catholicism. In the story, Hymie, a Polish immigrant during the Great Depression, has not lived a very happy life but still resists when he is visited by Death. An angel comes to Hymie's rescue, beating Death at a game of cards. However, Hymie must find somebody to take his place in death.

My Family: The Jewish Immigrants (1997), a collection of Beim's Jewish-plays, deals with the Jewish immigrant experience in America.

Charles Frazier's novel *Cold Mountain* (1997) won a National Book Award for its sympathetic portrayal of a Civil War deserter. Inman, a Confederate soldier, is wounded near the end of the war but does not die as expected. He escapes from his Southern hospital bed before he can be sent back to the front and attempts to return home to North Carolina and the woman he loves.

As Ella Lonn notes in her 1928 book *Desertion during the Civil War* (reprinted in 1994), many soldiers from both sides left their military units to return to their homes. Lonn's book analyzes the reasons why these soldiers deserted and discusses the various punishments that they faced.

Jack Todd is an American journalist and soldier who fled to British Columbia during the Vietnam War. In his book *Desertion: In the Time of Vietnam* (2001), he details his life in Canada among other deserters and expresses regret for his desertion. He also discusses how he renounced his American citizenship, which made him ineligible for the future pardon by President Jimmy Carter and unable to attend his mother's funeral in America because of fear of prosecution.

Further Study

Beevor, Antony, *The Fall of Berlin, 1945,* Viking Press, 2002.

Beever examines the massive advance of Soviet and other Allied troops to Berlin, which ultimately led to the defeat of Germany and the end of the European conflict. The author incorporates several eyewitness accounts and new research from both Soviet and German archives.

Beschloss, Michael R., *The Conquerors: Roosevelt, Truman and the Destruction of Hitler's Germany, 1941-1945,* Simon &Schuster, 2002.

Beschloss examines the political motivations of the American government and its allies during World War II. Their plan for postwar Germany ultimately led to the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Canfield, Bruce N., *U.S. Infantry Weapons of World War II,*Andrew Mowbray Publishers, 1996.

Canfield gives detailed, technical coverage of all of the portable weapons used by Americans during World War II.

Huie, William Bradford, *The Execution of Private Slovik,*Nuell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1954.

Huie's book was Beim's main inspiration for writing *The Deserter.*

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Beim, Norman, *The Deserter,* in *Six Award Winning Plays,* New Concept Press, 1995, pp. 233-51.

———, "Preface," in *Six Award Winning Plays,* New Concept Press, 1995, pp. viii-x.

Gilbert, Martin, *A History of the Twentieth Century,* Vol. 3, *1952-1999,* Perennial, 2000, p. 453.

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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 members□educational 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:

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