Funnyhouse of a Negro Study Guide

Funnyhouse of a Negro by Adrienne Kennedy

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BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Making its debut on January 14, 1964, at the East End Theater in New York City, *Funnyhouse of a Negro* was Adrienne Kennedy's first produced play. Early on, critics and audiences recognized the importance of the work. It received an Obie Award from *The Village Voice* for most distinguished play and continued to be produced in the United States and abroad throughout the 1960s.

The play chronicles the last hours in the life of Sarah, a young black woman troubled by race and identity. Kennedy's depiction of Sarah's hallucinatory subconscious struggling with self-hatred, race hatred, and alienation from the larger culture was regarded as powerful by some critics of the era. Other critics were confused by the staging and subject matter of the work.

Many scholars contend that *Funnyhouse of a Negro* was revolutionary in a number of ways, especially Kennedy's unique portrayal of what it was like to be black and a woman in the United States in the 1960s.

Author Biography

Kennedy was born Adrienne Hawkins on September 13, 1931, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She was raised in an ethnically diverse neighborhood in Cleveland, Ohio, where her father worked as a social worker and her mother was a schoolteacher.

When Kennedy entered Ohio State University in 1949, she experienced racism for the first time. Upon graduation in 1953, with a B.A. in education, Kennedy married Joseph C. Kennedy; the couple had two sons together before their divorce in 1966.

Kennedy began writing plays as early as the mid-1950s. When her husband returned from serving in the Korean War, the couple moved to New York City. She began her graduate studies in creative writing at various institutions and some of her fiction was published in the early 1960s.

To gain entrance into playwright Edward Albee' s workshop at Circle in the Square Theatre, Kennedy submitted two of her plays. One was called *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, which was deemed worthy of production in its original form.

Produced in 1964, the play won an Obie Award. Like many of her subsequent plays, *Funnyhouse of a Negro* was influenced by Kennedy's dreams and reflected her own experiences, serving as a social commentary on race, gender, exclusion and identity.

By the late 1960s, Kennedy began receiving commissions to write plays. For example, *Sun: A Poem for Malcolm X Inspired by His Murder* was commissioned by the Royal Court Theatre, London, and produced in 1968. She also began a secondary career as a guest lecturer at many institutions in this time period.

In 1976, Kennedy wrote *A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White,* about a writer who lives through film actors and the roles they play. A few years later, she adapted two plays by Euripides, *Electra* (1980) and *Orestes* (1981).

In the late 1980s Kennedy branched out into autobiography and fiction. In 1990 she wrote a play based on her college experiences. The central character of *Ohio State Murders,* Suzanne Alexander, appeared in several subsequent plays.

By this time, Kennedy's importance had been recognized by academics and critics alike, and she began receiving numerous accolades for her work.

Based in New York City, Kennedy continues to write fiction and dramas.

Plot Summary

Funnyhouse of a Negro opens in front of a closed curtain; a wild-haired woman, the Mother, walks across the stage carrying a bald head in front of her. She mumbles to herself, appearing to be in a trance.

After she exits, the curtain opens to reveal the Queen's chamber, with a tomb-like bed at center. In the chamber are two of Sarah's inner selves: the Duchess of Hapsburg and Queen Victoria.

The women look identical and wear royal gowns and ghostly masks. When knocking is heard, the Queen announces that it must be her father looking for her. The Duchess notes that their father is a black man and she wishes he was dead.

They both complain about him; the Duchess accuses him of killing their mother. Victoria claims that he is dead before the loud knocking ends and the lights go out in the chamber.

The Mother returns on stage carrying the head. She announces that she was raped by the black man, Sarah's father, then disappears. On another part of the stage, which features a square wall, Sarah (also known as the Negro) enters with a hangman's rope around her neck and with blood on her face. She carries a patch of kinky hair that is missing from a spot on her head.

Sarah addresses the audience in a monologue: she describes the place where she lives, a room that is located in a brownstone in New York City. Claiming that she idolizes Queen Victoria, she describes her conversations with the Queen. In these conversations, she states that being black is bad.

Sarah also describes her background; particularly her education, interest in poetry, and her desire to live in a room with European antiques. In this scenario, Sarah makes it clear that she wants to surround herself with things from the white world in order to ignore her African American heritage. The pressure of this self-hatred has caused her hair to fall out; she is almost bald. She also has a boyfriend, Raymond; he is a Jewish poet who is interested in African American culture.

As Sarah continues to talk, her four inner selves stand together on stage: in addition to the Queen and the Duchess, a hunchbacked dwarf named Jesus and a black man with a split head named Patrice Lumumba make an appearance.

Sarah claims that she killed her father. Outside of Sarah's room, in the hallway of the rooming house, the Landlady appears. She informs the audience that Sarah's father hung himself inside a hotel in Harlem when Patrice Lumumba was murdered. The Landlady describes Sarah's habit of hiding in her room.

Located above Sarah's room is the funnyhouse ruled by Raymond, known as the Funnyman. Raymond and the Duchess talk, with the Duchess clinging to Raymond's leg. The Duchess worries about her father's imminent arrival from Africa. Raymond confirms that her father is the man who shot himself when Patrice Lumumba was murdered.

The Duchess describes her father as a man who went to Africa as a Christian missionary in the jungle. She opens the bag she is carrying, which is full of her hair. She describes her father and the rape of her mother. She describes herself as in-between her father's darkness and mother's lightness. The Duchess also reveals that her mother is in an insane asylum.

Patrice Lumumba addresses the audience in a monologue. He lost his hair too. Furthermore, he describes his mother watching her hair fall out strand by strand, because of "black diseases." Inside the Queen's chamber, the Queen discovers that her hair has fallen out too. The Duchess tries to put her own hair back on her head.

Patrice describes his background the same way Sarah did earlier: where he lives, how he majored in English in college, and how he writes poetry. He also wants white friends to go with his room filled with European antiques. But he says he will despise them as he does himself. He also claims to have hit his father, which caused him to lose his hair.

With her inner selves walking around her, Sarah describes how her paternal grandmother wanted her father to be Christ and save his people. Her paternal grandfather believed that his race was not worth saving. His parents did want him to marry Sarah's mother.

When Sarah's parents went to Africa as missionaries, her mother fell out of love with her father. Sarah's mother would not be touched by him, but after her father started to drink, he raped her mother resulting in Sarah. She announces that she loved her mother more than her father when they lived in Africa.

After her mother's hair began falling out, the family returned to the United States. Sarah says that her father felt like a Judas for driving her mother to an insane asylum, and he once tried to hang himself in a hotel in Harlem.

Inside the Duchess's place (a ballroom with a chandelier), Jesus and the Duchess talk. Jesus is upset that he lost his hair. The Duchess shows him that she is also bald. While the knocking continues, Jesus and the Duchess try to fix their remaining strands of hair. They talk about how their father will not leave them alone.

Outside Sarah's room, the Landlady continues to talk. She describes events from Sarah's father's perspective: he wanted Sarah's forgiveness for being black.

Back inside the Duchess's place, Jesus and the Duchess have fallen asleep. Jesus wakes up and tells God he has tried to escape being black. He decides to go to Africa and kill Patrice Lumumba.

After a blackout, a jungle scene covers the entire stage. Each of Sarah's four inner selves appears, wearing a nimbus. Jesus says that he always believed his father was God. They all describe how they each wanted their father dead, and how their mother died because she was touched by a black man.

Furthermore, the inner selves believe that their father killed their mother and that he is also dead. Yet he continues to knock at the door. They describe a scene in which he begs Sarah for forgiveness, and her mother appears. Sarah hits him with an ebony hand. They four selves laugh and cheer in victory.

A wall drops, and Sarah's room is revealed. Sarah has hung herself, and her father rushes toward her. Outside the room, the Landlady tells Raymond that Sarah has hung herself like her father did when Patrice Lumumba died. Raymond calls Sarah a liar, explaining that her father is a black doctor married to a white woman.

Part 1

Part 1 Summary

In the center of the stage is the bedroom of a young Negro woman, Sarah. Around this room are the various rooms that are the settings for other scenes of the play.

Before the play begins, a white woman in a white nightgown with long, straight black hair crosses the stage mumbling. As she goes out, the curtain rises, revealing the Duchess of Hapsburg and Queen Victoria in the Queen's bedroom. They both wear headpieces that conceal mounds of wild, curly black hair. They also wear masks, painted a whitish yellow color, or wear facial makeup of the same whitish yellow color.

A knocking is heard and continues throughout the scene. The conversation between the Duchess and Queen Victoria reveals that the person knocking is the Duchess's father, a very dark Negro man. He had raped the Duchess's mother, and both women feel bound to him, because even though he's dead, he keeps returning.

The woman who had first crossed the stage crosses again, and this time we understand her words as she refers to how she should never have let a Negro man touch her.

A woman referred to as "Negro" appears, dressed in black with a noose around her neck. She has a long monologue filled with poetic imagery about how she lives in a small room in a New York apartment, how the room is dominated by a large very white statue of Queen Victoria, and how she pretends sometimes to be the Duchess of Hapsburg having conversations with the Queen. Negro refers to her days as a student, to wearing black all the time, and to black being the symbol of evil and spiritual darkness. She then talks about her desire to be "pallid like Negroes on the covers of American Negro magazines" and speaks of writing poetry on pages of white paper and longing to have white friends. She refers to the way in which she, "like all educated Negroes," has to guard herself from self-recognition, and says that if she hadn't had a moment of self-recognition, she wouldn't have lost her hair and therefore wouldn't have attacked her father with a black mask. She describes herself as having no obviously Negroid features except for her kinky black hair.

As she continues, she transforms into Sarah. At the same time, other characters, including the Duchess, Queen Victoria and a Negro man carrying a black mask cross the stage.

Sarah speaks of the rooms around her as a funnyhouse, the place where her various selves exist. She also speaks of how she herself knows no real places or real relationships but instead struggles to define herself through the relationships between her various selves.

As she finishes, the Landlady appears. She is a clown-like character who repeatedly laughs like a maniac as she tells how Sarah has stayed in her room ever since her

father hung himself, and of how she repeats the same thing over and over, words that we understand are the same words with which the Duchess had spoken about the constant visits of her father. The Landlady says that she keeps trying to tell Sarah that her father's death was not her fault, but then says that Sarah always replies that she had bashed her father's head in with the black skull he had carried with him everywhere. The Landlady goes on to say that Sarah has suffered to the point that her hair has fallen out, and that she always thought of Sarah as believing she was someone else, perhaps a queen.

Part 1 Analysis

The setting for this play is intended to resemble a funnyhouse, an attraction at a fair or carnival in which there are several rooms that present reality in an extreme or bizarre way and force those going through the house to interact with their surroundings in an equally extreme way. In the extended, very poetic metaphor that is this play, the funnyhouse represents the various ways in which Sarah, who herself represents Negro confusion and self-hatred, sees herself, her parents, and her world.

At the core of the metaphor is a nugget of story that we mostly learn through the Landlady. For example, from her first monologue, we understand that Sarah's father committed suicide, that Sarah believed he did it because of her attitudes towards him, and that Sarah herself committed suicide out of guilt. Around this story are densely layered and multi-faceted images that simultaneously obscure and reveal the truth, all of which combine with the funnyhouse setting to make the thematic point that the Negro in contemporary society is profoundly and violently separate from his or her own identity.

This point is initially made through the depiction of the other characters as aspects of Sarah's fragmented personality separate from her core sense of self, but most vividly appears in the image of Negro, who is played by the same actor who plays Sarah, appearing with a noose around her neck. The noose is a symbol of the way that Negroes were lynched by white supremacist organizations like the Ku Klux Klan. In this context, the image combines with what Negro is saying to suggest that Negroes as a people are participating, and have participated, in personal and racial self-lynching.

The images of the play, particularly those related to the sexual relationship between Sarah's Negro father and white mother, suggest that white culture perceives Negroes as evil, sexually omnipotent and destructive, and that Negroes themselves have acted to distance themselves from their heritage as a simple act of self-preservation. This idea is reinforced by the disparaging comment about Negroes on the cover of Negro magazines, which suggests that Negroes who've done so are selling out their culture and self-identity.

Layered around the cores of story and metaphor image are oft-repeated stories full of African imagery that reveal the potential beauty of Negro identity at the same time as they define the hatred of society, and of Sarah herself, for the Negro both as concept and individual. Ultimately, however, the setting of the play inside the twisted reality of a

funnyhouse suggests that this hatred is a false reality, meaning that as an examination of and commentary on Negroes' perceptions of themselves, the play calls for letting go of false perceptions.

Part 2

Part 2 Summary

The Duchess, now half-undressed and missing half of her hair, speaks with Raymond, a white man dressed as a funnyhouse guide. The Duchess refers to her fear of her visiting Negro father, speaking with the language and images she had used in speaking with Queen Victoria. She tells Raymond that her father was a Christian missionary in Africa, and pleads with Raymond to keep her hidden. She tells him that fear of her father made her hair fall out and says that she knows he wants to touch her in the way he touched her mother. She says that her mother is in an asylum, bald.

Knocking is heard throughout this scene. A Negro man carrying a mask appears, speaks of how his hair has fallen out, and tells of a dream he had in which his mother called him to her as she lay on her bed watching her own hair fall out. He says she kept repeating the phrase "black man" over and over; in the dream, he ran from her, but she followed.

In the Queen's chamber, in a scene played out in silence, Queen Victoria discovers that her hair has fallen out. The Duchess appears with a bag full of hair and attempts to place it back on her head. Meanwhile the Negro man reappears, now carrying a black mask. He refers to himself as Patrice Lumumba and also as a "nigger" born between two generations, the one born at the turn of the century and the one born before the Depression in the 1930's. He speaks negatively of his life as a student, repeating language used by the woman with the noose around her neck. He comments on how he despises himself, saying that if he did not despise himself, his hair would not have fallen out and he would not have beaten his father to death with the mask.

Part 2 Analysis

The Duchess is an aspect of Sarah, and her reference to her father's becoming a Christian missionary is a reference to the way that many Negroes have left behind their own ways of relating to their souls in favor of Christianity, the white man's religion. The suggestion here is that such fervent acceptance of Christianity is another way that Negroes have built up a wall between themselves and their own identities. At the same time, the reference to the Duchess' hair falling out, an image that recurs throughout the play, is a reference back to Sarah's comment that her only Negroid feature is her hair. The image of hair falling out suggests that Sarah wishes that she could be rid of her hair, the only part of her that is identifiably Negro, and thereby become white.

The man in the second part of the scene represents the aspect of Sarah's personality that is most like her father. His dream is yet another manifestation of Sarah's desire to be rid of her hair. It is also a representation of how she is haunted by the fact that her mother was haunted by the idea of intimacy with a Negro man.

The silent scene played out by the Duchess and Queen Victoria as the Duchess struggles to make it look as though she still has hair represents the way that Sarah has struggled to incorporate aspects of her being Negro into her almost completely white life. This, in turn, represents the struggle that Negroes in general have faced while trying to hold on to their own culture and identity in the face of white domination. Meanwhile, the Negro man again represents Sarah's father, the part of herself that she struggles to both accommodate and bury. His final words about how he despises himself reveal the truth behind Sarah's splintered view of reality, reinforcing the notion that the play is about the self-lynching undertaken by Negroes.

For the first time, the mask that the man carries is referred to as being "ebony," which is symbolically important, because ebony is jet black and found in Africa. The image of the ebony mask, therefore, and of the reference to Sara having killed her father with it, speaks of Sarah having killed her father with his own blackness. This is a poetic way of defining his death as having been caused by Sarah, her resentment of her father's racial identity, and what she sees that identity as having done to her.

Patrice Lumumba was a human rights activist in the African country of Congo and was assassinated with the participation of a white government. The invocation of his name in this play suggests that on some level, Sarah identifies herself, her suffering, and eventually her death with Lumumba's. The implication is that the core reason for both deaths is the Negro-ness of both victims and the hatred of white society for the Negro in general.

Part 3

Part 3 Summary

The Negro man speaks in another long monologue about how his father's mother had dreamed that one day he would be a Christ for his race. In poetic images that refer to the beauty of Africa, he speaks of how she had wanted him to return there, re-learn what life was like there, come back, and save his people. He says that his father's mother hadn't wanted his father to marry his mother, but that the marriage had gone ahead anyway. He then talks about how, after the marriage, his mother and father had gone to Africa. His father had fallen out of love with his mother there and had come home drunk one night and raped her. The Negro man tells of how he identified with, loved and took care of his mother, which caused his father to become very angry and struggle even more to become a Christ, or a messiah, for his race. He goes on to talk about how he and his parents had come back to New York and how his mother had gone into an asylum. His father had kept telling him that soldiers were coming after him, planning to nail him to a cross and leave him for dead. The Negro man finishes by saying that his father hated himself so much he had tried to hang himself in a Harlem hotel room.

Part 3 Analysis

This part of the play layers more information around the nugget of story at the core of this play. Again, the man speaks in Sarah's voice, and again he tells her story. We learn of her father's background and the hatred he faced from his white wife and from white culture. His story further illuminates the way in which Negroes are inundated by hatred from both outside and internal sources, showing how white society hates Negroes for being different at the same time as Negroes hate themselves. This self-hate is represented by the Negro man's rejection by his mother.

The image of the Negro man on the cross reinforces the idea that Negroes struggling to keep their own identity and inspire other Negroes to do the same are rejected in the same way Christ was rejected by both his own people (Jews who called for his execution), and Gentiles who were afraid of the people his preaching was inspiring. Meanwhile, the image of the cross is an echo of the Ku Klux Klan in the same way that the noose was; a burning cross is a symbol of the Klan's determination to keep Negroes subservient, if not to destroy them altogether. Finally, the mention of Harlem refers to the part of New York City in which Negroes were ghettoized, living lives that often became filled with poverty, isolation and violence. This reference suggests an aspect of being Negro that Sarah is afraid of and determined to reject.

Part 4

Part 4 Summary

In the richly decorated house of the Duchess of Hapsburg, Jesus screams with terror because his hair has fallen out. The Duchess, however, quite calmly shows that even though hers has fallen out too, she is still able to use it to disguise her baldness.

The sound of knocking returns and continues throughout the scene as Jesus and the Duchess comb each other's bald heads and speak together the words first spoken by the Duchess at the beginning of the play, when she had commented on her father's blackness.

The Landlady reappears, telling how Sarah's father had sent her a letter and asked for her forgiveness. In the letter, he had written that his existence depended on her embracing him and therefore herself. The Landlady goes on to say that he had actually come to see Sarah, but had gone away without her forgiveness. She says that one Easter, Sarah had gone to see her father but missed him because he had come to see her. She had returned home to find him drunk and asking again for her forgiveness, but she had run past him without acknowledging him. In language that repeats the poetic imagery of Africa, the Landlady says that Sarah's father told her the story of how his mother wanted him to be Christ for his people. She then comments on how Patrice Lumumba is now dead.

Back in the home of the Duchess, Jesus and the Duchess have both fallen asleep. Jesus wakes, saying that he's going to go back to Africa and kill Patrice Lumumba in the name of God and of Queen Victoria.

Part 4 Analysis

Jesus screaming about his hair and showing his baldness is another representation of the suffering experienced by the Negro man in the previous monologue. Since hair has been seen to be the aspect of her racial identity that Sarah wants most to be rid of, and since the Negro man in the monologue compared himself to Jesus, the fact that Jesus loses his hair in this scene represents the way in which the Negro man feels he has lost his identity.

The way that the Duchess shows how the hair can be used to give the impression that it's still there represents the way Negroes can give false impressions that their identities are still in place. Given that both the Duchess and Jesus represent aspects of Sarah's personality, this scene represents the way in which Sarah's identity remains intact in spite of her desire to get rid of it.

The knocking that returns as the Duchess and Jesus comb each other's heads, and which has occurred repeatedly throughout the play, represents Sarah's constant

awareness of her father's blackness in her life. It also represents the fact that she is haunted by both the way she was conceived, as the result of a rape, and the way that both her conception and her father's blackness are constant threats to her sense of self.

The Landlady's monologue adds another layer of detail to the nugget of story at the core of this play, indicating that Sarah's self-hatred contributed to her father's own self-hatred, which in turn contributed to his suicide. The detail of their final confrontation taking place on Easter combines with the references to Patrice Lumumba to suggest that in his death, Sara's father did in fact become a Christ for his people.

Since Christ rose from the dead on Easter Sunday, on one level the father's visiting on that day suggests that coming to see Sarah was like a rising from the dead; the metaphor is strengthened by the fact that we have already been told that he dreamed about being killed on the cross in the same way that Christ was. On another level, setting his visit on Easter suggests that the visit was an opportunity for Sarah to redeem herself and embrace her heritage, since by His death and resurrection on Easter, Christ redeemed humanity from their sins.

The Christ/Easter symbolism is, of course, ironic given that we've already seen how Christianity is viewed in this play as the white man's church and is suggested to be one of the ways in which Negroes have moved away from their own identities. This irony is manifested further in the scene in which Jesus vows to kill Lumumba in the name of God and Queen Victoria, who at one time had been given the nickname "Great White Mother" by the citizens of India, who came under her rule and were manipulated into both white culture and Christianity in the same ways that Africans were. In short, the ironic symbology reinforces yet again the ways in which Negro people have so thoroughly internalized white perspectives on their culture and identities.

Part 5

Part 5 Summary

Lighting suggests that all of the rooms of the funnyhouse have become a jungle. Jesus appears, announcing that he always believed his father to be God. The Duchess, Queen Victoria and Patrice Lumumba then appear, and they all circle through the jungle, repeating the story of Sarah's father, referring to his blackness, how he's haunted her life, and how he keeps knocking at her door. The characters repeat the story over and over, becoming louder and louder, circling through the jungle again and again. Suddenly they become still, and in unison speak in poetic language of how Sarah's father had visited her, sitting in the hallway, begging for forgiveness.

The language shifts and becomes spoken from Sarah's point of view. The speakers accuse her father of raping her mother. We hear how, when he visited, Sarah's father's face had become anguished, and Sarah had imagined beating him to death with the ebony mask. There is a moment of stillness, and then the characters run and shout and laugh.

A statue of Queen Victoria appears, very white. Sarah stands very still. We hear the knocking, and the figure of her father rushes toward her. There is a blackout, and then we see Sarah hanging by the noose in her room.

The Landlady appears, announcing that Sarah has hung herself. Raymond appears and calls Sarah a liar. The Landlady says that Sarah had told her that her father had hung himself, but Raymond says that this is not true. He says that Sarah's father is a doctor married to a white whore, and then he repeats the description Sarah gave of her life as a student - living in a city in a room full of antiques and books. Raymond says Sarah's father eats at a white glass table.

Part 5 Analysis

This final sequence of scenes illustrates the way in which Sarah's hatred of herself and of her race is entirely self-constructed. In other words, she has created her own funnyhouse. The first part of the scene, in which the various aspects of herself prowl through what has become a jungle, suggests that she has become lost in, and overwhelmed by, her self-lynching attitudes. This manifests in the repeated comments about how she hates her father referring to him as an ugly thing; they are all, in fact, comments about her hatred of being even partly Negro.

The second half of the scene, in which we discover that her father didn't really kill himself, illustrates that both the jungle and Sarah's beliefs are merely interpretations of reality, rather than reality itself. We see how Sarah has created her reactions and has ended up destroying herself, or rather her sense of identity, since the suicide itself is not intended to be taken literally. Like everything else in the play, it is a metaphorical

representation of the way Sarah in particular and Negroes in general have destroyed their sense of self in the name of both fitting in with white society and avoiding its hatred and fear.

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Characters

Mrs, Conrad

See Landlady

Duchess ofHapsburg

The Duchess is one of Sarah's inner selves, arguably the closest to Sarah's true self. She represents the aspect of Sarah's subconscious that is racist. She blames her father for her mother's death. Like all the inner selves, she has lost almost all of her hair.

Funnyhouse Lady

See Landlady

Funnyhouse Man

See Raymond

Jesus

One of Sarah's inner selves, Jesus is a hunchbacked dwarf with yellow skin. Sarah describes him as the son of Queen Victoria. He shares the Duchess of Hapsburg's disdain of Sarah's father. Jesus decides to hunt down and kill Patrice Lumumba. Like all the inner selves, he loses almost all of his hair.

Landlady

The Landlady is a white woman who runs the boarding house where Sarah lives. She comments on the action and Sarah's life, providing a needed perspective on what is happening. She believes that Sarah has hidden in her room ever since Patrice Lumumba was murdered and her father hung herself in a Harlem hotel.

The Landlady also says that Sarah's hair has fallen out because of her suffering. She offers insight into Sarah's father's background, and recalls incidents in which he tried to reconcile with his daughter. It is the Landlady who discovers that Sarah has killed herself.

Patrice Lumumba

Patrice Lumumba is one of Sarah's inner selves. He is a black man whose head is split in half; his eyes have blood and tissue in them. He carries an ebony mask..

Patrice seems to represent Sarah's father, though he describes himself in the exact same words that Sarah uses to describe herself. Yet he also introduces the theme of self-hatred in the play. Like all the inner selves, Patrice has lost his hair.

Man

See Patrice Lumumba

The Negro

See Sarah

Queen Victoria Regina

Queen Victoria is one of Sarah's inner selves; she looks exactly like the Duchess of Hapsburg. Sarah describes her as the mother of Jesus. She describes how Sarah's father searched for her. Like the other inner selves, Queen Victoria loses most of her hair during the play.

Raymond

Raymond is a Jewish poet who lives above Sarah in the rooming house. She describes him as a boyfriend who is interested in African Americans.

At the end of the play, Raymond is present when the Landlady discovers that Sarah has killed herself. He informs the Landlady that Sarah's father is a doctor married to a white woman. It seems that Sarah's father never committed suicide.

Sarah

Sarah is the protagonist of the play and is represented on stage by four of her inner selves: Queen Victoria, the Duchess of Hapsburg, Jesus, and Patrice Lumumba.

Only a few facts are clear among the many versions of her "reality." Sarah is the product of an interracial marriage: her mother is white and her father is African-American. She studied English at a college in New York City, writes poetry, and works as a librarian. She lives in a brownstone rooming house in New York City.

Sarah's primary problem relates to racial identity and related issues: she is conflicted about her heritage, especially concerning her father. By the end of the play, it is clear that Sarah has killed herself.

What is not clear is her real relationship to Raymond, who also lives in the rooming house. She may or may not have been involved with him. Similarly, she may or may not have been born in Africa, and her mother may or may not have been committed to an insane asylum. Sarah's inner conflicts form the heart of the play.

Themes

Identity

At the core of *Funnyhouse of a Negro* is Sarah's internal struggle to understand and accept her identity as an African American woman in the United States. Each of Sarah's four "selves" her subcon scious's way of dealing with her identity issues represents a facet of Sarah.

Two of her four selves are white European women of royal blood: the Duchess of Hapsburg and Queen Victoria. Sarah also has a large statue of Victoria in her room. This emphasizes her desire to identify more with her mother, who was white or a light-skinned African American depending on differing interpretations of the text. The Queen and the Duchess despise Sarah's dark-skinned father and what she thinks that represents: impurity, beastliness, and evilness.

Two of Sarah's inner selves are men: Jesus and Patrice Lumumba. The latter is an African revoluionary who was the first Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. After he left office, he was assassinated. He represents Sarah's father the dark side of her heritage and her selfhatred. Through the persona of Lumumba, Sarah claims that she killed her father.

Sarah's fourth self, Jesus, is a dwarf and a hunchback with yellow skin. Jesus represents Sarah's father as a martyr. Through Jesus, Sarah expresses her desire to kill Lumumba and escape being black.

By the end of *Funnyhouse*, Sarah realizes that she cannot get escape her racial identity though she claims she does not have particularly black features and kills herself.

Alienation and Loneliness

Sarah's problems with identity in *Funnyhouse of a Negro* lead to alienation and loneliness. Because she is of mixed heritage and she has confused ideas about what each heritage represents she feels alienated from both black and white cultures. This alienation leads to loneliness.

It is implied that Sarah's father has made numerous attempts to reach his daughter, but she has rejected him repeatedly. Some of her selves claim that he killed himself. So she rejects that side of herself.

Sarah also rejects the white side of herself. She claims her mother is dead or in an asylum. Her landlady does not understand her. Sarah says she does not love her white Jewish boyfriend, a poet named Raymond. She claims, "He is very interested in Negroes," which implies he is not interested in Sarah for herself, but her racial identity.

Appearances and Reality/ Truth and Falsehood

Both truth and reality are murky in *Funnyhouse of a Negro*. The truth about Sarah's parents their marriage, courtship, the details of Sarah's conception, if they are alive is unclear. Each of her four selves, as well as Sarah herself, relates a slightly different story, especially about Sarah's father.

Furthermore, what Sarah really thinks of herself is also not clear. It is obvious that Sarah has problems with her mixed heritage. Yet she really does not express anything positive about either heritage beyond the idea that white is better than black: the reality of her feelings is essentially indiscernible. Even Sarah's landlady and boyfriend do not know the real truth about her Raymond calls her "a funny little liar" after her death.

Because the play takes place primarily in Sarah's troubled mind, what is true and what is false is not always clear.

Style

Setting

Because *Funnyhouse of a Negro* is a surreal play that takes place primarily inside Sarah's mind, only a few aspects of the setting are "real."

Set in the early 1960s, the play takes place in Sarah's room in a New York City brownstone. Her room features a large statue of Queen Victoria, other pictures of British monarchs, books, a bed, and a writing table. Some of the "realistic" action takes place on the landing and inside Raymond' s room.

The play has several settings specific to Sarah's four selves. For example, the Queen has her own chamber with a tomb-like mahogany bed, a chandelier, and walls the color of wine. The Duchess has her own space: a ballroom with a chandelier, marbled floor, fake snow, and benches. In the final scenes, a jungle replaces these rooms, altering their symbolic meaning.

Monologue

There is very little action and dialogue in *Funnyhouse of a Negro;* in fact, much of play is in the form of monologues. Kennedy uses the monologue to let the characters speak freely.

Sarah and her four inner selves use their monologues to relate a version of Sarah's family background and emotional crisis. None are exactly the same, which illustrates her inability to come to terms with her life.

In the Landlady's monologues, she relates stories about Sarah's "real" life, as she has observed and understood it. Only Raymond lacks a true monologue. All of his words are part of a dialogue with other characters.

Symbolism/Imagery

Many of the ideas in *Funnyhouse of a Negro* are expressed by numerous symbols and images. Very little is realistic in the play. Even the characters are symbolic.

Sarah's four selves represent different aspects of her identity: the Duchess and Queen Victoria wear masks or mask-like makeup and white clothing reminiscent of funeral shrouds; Jesus is a yellow-skinned hunch-backed dwarf; and Patrice Lumumba carries an ebony mask.

The character of Sarah's mother is even more symbolic she carries a bald head as she moves across stage several times. While Sarah's mother is mentioned frequently, she

speaks only once. Sarah' s mother only flits through her daughter's unconscious: she is only to be discussed and interpreted, not really understood.

Kennedy's stage directions calls for numerous physical symbols and complex images. For example, Sarah's room is dominated by a statue of Queen Victoria, a white ideal of purity and royalty that she will never be able to match. Sarah walks around with a noose around her neck and a bloody face before the audience is told that she is dead. This emphasizes her inner pain as well as her eventual fate.

In the segment that introduces Queen Victoria and the Duchess, black ravens circle overhead, which contrasts with their white-tinged faces and bright white light. Raymond's status as the Funnyman is emphasized by the mirrors behind the blinds in his room that he opens and closes repeatedly. These are but a few of the symbols used in the play to underscore Sarah's state of mind.

Historical Context

In the United States, the early 1960s were marked by social and political transformations. One of the most important was the Civil Rights movement, which had been fighting for civil rights for African Americans for a number of years.

At the beginning of the decade, the fight for civil rights took several forms: sit-ins at segregated lunch counters; marches through segregated areas; and boycotts of discriminatory businesses. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) filed several lawsuits to serve a civil rights agenda. Hopes were high that newly elected President John F. Kennedy would fulfill his promises to pass civil rights legislation.

Kennedy never got a chance to fulfill his agenda; tragically, he was assassinated in November 1963. However, his successor, Lyndon B. Johnson, did continue the civil rights agenda. In 1964, he signed into law several bills that guaranteed civil rights for African Americans and other minorities.

The most important was the Civil Rights Act of 1964. It guaranteed equal opportunity for employment and public places (such as hotels, theaters, and restaurants). Access to employment could not be denied based on race, gender, religion or national origin.

The Civil Rights Act also gave the federal government several means to enforce the law. For example, they could cut off funding to any lower form of government that did not comply. The Justice Department could bring lawsuits against those who failed to adhere to the provisions.

Johnson also signed into law the Equal Opportunity Act in 1964, which was designed to create jobs and fight poverty. Organizations like the United Steelworkers followed Johnson's lead. The United Steelworkers and eleven major steel companies signed an agreement to end racial discrimination in their industry.

Despite such efforts, implementation of civil rights was not always easy. Schools and universities had been ordered to integrate as early as the 1950s, but such changes had been resisted, especially in the South. The Civil Rights Act allowed the government to withhold funds if they did not take measures towards integration.

Voting rights were also part of the Civil Rights agenda. State and local governments, especially in the South, had taken legal measures designed to prohibit African Americans from exercising their voting rights, including polls taxes and voter tests. Poll taxes were outlawed by the 24th Amendment to the Constitution in 1964.

Many civil rights activists traveled to Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia to educate black voters about their rights and get them registered to vote. Many activists were arrested, beaten, and even killed.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., an African-American leader in the civil rights movement who advocated nonviolence, won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 included a provision for banning employment discrimination based on gender. Though this part of the Civil Rights Act was not enforced for several years, the role of women was already changing in American society.

Women entered the workforce in greater numbers. By the beginning of the 1960s, about one-third of American women were employed often in part time, low-paying jobs to supplement income or as teachers.

In 1963, Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique,* which suggested that women could find fulfillment in the workplace. That same year, an equal pay bill was passed.

The women's rights movement would intensify and grow by the mid-1960s.

Critical Overview

Funnyhouse of a Negro has garnered a mixed critical reaction since its original production in 1964. While many critics found something to praise about Kennedy's writing talent, some were not sure what to make of the play. Most reviewers viewed it as an important exploration of race and identity in contemporary society.

Joshua Billings of *The New Yorker* is a prime example of the qualified praise often accorded Kennedy. He wrote, "As a rule, I don't take to Expressionism, partly because its built-in weirdness and distortion tend to make the material it deals with seem more important than it really is. The material here couldn't be much more important to begin with, so that's all right, I guess, and the style does seem appropriate. *Funnyhouse* is a first play and, as such, is quite strong and original."

Other contemporary critics were more straightforward in their praise of the play. *The Nation's* Harold Clurman wrote, "The play, the general theme of which may be defined as what it may mean to be a colored person in the United States, embraces far more than plays of similar theme when they are couched in terms of pathetic appeals for 'tolerance' and fair play."

Like Billings, many critics felt obligated to contrast the surreal play to mainstream theater. Howard Taubman of *The New York Times* noted: "But if nothing much happens according to conventional theatrical tenets, a relatively unknown territory is explored and exposed. Miss Kennedy, herself a Negro, digs unsparingly into Sarah's aching psyche...."

Critics maintained that the play set the tone for Kennedy's career; she was seen as the vanguard of a movement by many scholars. Yet there remained some debate as to how to classify the play. Some perceived it as an example of ritual theater, while other scholars contended that it was more symbolic and absurdist.

Many commentators asserted that the play provided psychological insight into the identity struggles for African Americans and women. In 1975, Lorraine A. Brown contended: "That we are allowed to experience this play from within Sarah's mind and sensibility and that the form of the play so noticeably aids our understanding of her struggle are only two measures of its fineness. Equally brilliant is the deep probing of the female psyche which reaches an admirable level of universality...."

As Kennedy's significance in the theater world was recognized, her plays were performed again. There were several productions of *Funnyhouse* in the 1990s.

In a 1995 revival in New York City, critics remained divided over the play, in part because of the way times had changed. The racial context had changed and some of Kennedy's ideas seemed dated. As a result, the play has not endured the test of time.

In one review, John Simon of *New York* dismissed Kennedy entirely. He wrote "Not much goes on in *Funnyhouse....* The author, who here goes by Negro-Sarah, is a young black would-be playwright who unhappy with her lot projects herself onto other characters.... Each of these is styled 'one of herselves,' and each is a crashing bore."

Other reviewers had negative assessments of the play. Ben Brantley of *The New York Times*, critiquing both *Funnyhouse* and *A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White*, maintained: "It is true that theater doesn't get much more egocentric than these two plays.... But Ms. Kennedy has carefully forged an emotional bridge that one cannot avoid crossing, regardless of race, age, or sex."

Brantley claimed: "Deeply personal, poetic and nonlinear, they [her plays] would appear to be better suited to academia than to the stage."

Criticism

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

Critical Essay #1

In this essay, Petrusso explores two prominent symbols used in Kennedy's play.

Adrienne Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro* uses many symbols to underscore the torment that Sarah feels about herself and her racial identity. Nearly everyone and everything in the play has symbolic meaning from the opening depiction of Sarah's mother wearing a white nightgown to Raymond's smug explanation of what he believes to be the "truth" about his girlfriend because the play is nonlinear and fragmented.

Two of the most interesting and disturbing symbols in *Funnyhouse* are the obsession with hair and baldness throughout the text, and the use of knocking in some scenes.

Hair plays a complex role in *Funnyhouse.* It defines characters and marks their evolution. In addition, it is the prominent physical difference between black people and white people.

Hair also links scenes and illustrates Sarah's inevitable fate. Kennedy's use of hair underscores the idea that Sarah tried to disavow then kill the African American part of her background.

The knocking complements the symbolism of the hair. Her father's knocking will not cease because she cannot escape her father's heritage. This essay explores how these symbols are used within *Funnyhouse.*

When the play opens, the first character seen on stage is a representation of Sarah's mother. She is also called Woman, and is described like this: "Her hair is wild, straight and black and falls to her waist." There is critical contention over the race of Sarah's mother because of certain ambiguous phrases used by Kennedy. Some believe that she is a light-skinned African American, while others are of the opinion that she is white.

For the purposes of this essay, it only matters that she is perceived by Sarah to be the epitome of light, white, and purity elements defiled by her African-American father. Also, this is a version of her mother in Sarah's mind: she may or may not be what Sarah's mother is really like.

Sarah's mother is the only female character inside Sarah's mind who fully retains her hair. Yet when Sarah's mother first appears on stage, she is carrying a bald head, establishing her link between hair and hair loss. What Sarah's mother represents is idealized by her daughter, as can be seen by her hair, which Sarah's mother retains throughout the play.

Yet Sarah also claims that all of her mother's hair fell out when she was unhappily living in Africa where her father was a missionary. Sarah claims that her father raped her mother, which caused the hair loss and resulted in Sarah's birth. Sarah goes so far as to claim that her mother was put in an asylum because of her father.

In Sarah's confused and confusing mind, her mother represents all that is good but she is still seen by Sarah as a victim of blackness. This leaves Sarah in a dilemma over her own sense of identity.

Sarah attempts to solve this dilemma through four inner selves that she creates. When two of them Queen Victoria and the Duchess of Haps-burg are introduced, they each have a full head of kinky hair. In reality, these two women were white, and by the time *Funnyhouse* was written, very dead.

The Queen and the Duchess speak for part of Sarah's subconscious. They are white, but their hair is meant to be black, showing how Sarah perceives her identity conflict. Sarah cannot escape her racial heritage, no matter how white she tries to be.

Their introductory scene is punctuated by a constant knocking. The Duchess points out that they are still tied to Sarah's father even though he is dead. The play is essentially Sarah's realization of this fact, but not her acceptance of it. The door will eventually have to be answered.

Sarah seems closest to the Duchess, the most prominent inner self. When Sarah visits her white boyfriend Raymond (in her mind), it is in the persona of the Duchess. While she talks to him and acts seductively towards him, she also describes her unexpected hair loss. Indeed, she brings her hair in a red bag to the room. She frantically tells him that when she awoke that morning, most of it was gone. Sarah/Duchess shows her white boyfriend that she has lost her most obvious African-American feature. This event is disturbing to her.

Later, Queen Victoria's hair falls out while she is asleep, though she does not reveal this in words. She acts it out in pantomime during a break in Patrice Lumumba's monologue. After the Queen loses her hair, the Duchess tries to put her replace her hair. She fails. Sarah can't have it both ways: to not be black and to be black at the same time.

Sarah has a number of inner male selves. Like the Queen and the Duchess, these inner selves are historical figures who are dead by the time the play begins. One male inner-self, Patrice Lumumba, is black. He was an African revolutionary leader who was murdered around the time the play was written. Although the stage directions do not specify his physical hair loss, Lumumba describes and further illuminates hair/hair loss as a symbol in the play.

When Lumumba is introduced as "Man," the knocking returns for the first time since the Queen and the Duchess made their initial appearance. He describes how all his hair fell out in the morning, in terms similar to those used by the Duchess.

Lumumba does the same thing when he describes his life. He uses the same terms as Sarah did describing her life, but uses language that is much harsher. He also relates a version of how Sarah's mother's hair fell out until she was bald. Sarah cannot totally immerse herself in her Lumumba self. He represents her father and what he stands for: blackness and everything she hates.

Yet Lumumba is given the lines that reveal what may be the secret to hair in the play. He says, "For if I did not despise myself then my hair would not have fallen and if my hair had not fallen then I would not have bludgeoned my father's face with an ebony mask." While this statement may not be literally true, it shows the pivotal role hair plays in the play.

Sarah seems more sympathetic to another male inner-self Jesus than to Lumumba. She says that "Jesus is Victoria's son," and she definitely favors white royalty. Jesus is a hunchback, a dwarf, and yellow-skinned, the latter the same term Sarah uses to describe herself.

In his major scene with the Duchess, Jesus shows her how all his hair has fallen out. The Duchess explains to him how she tried to put it back on, then comforts him. They comb each other's remaining hairs: a gesture of futile solidarity since their hair continues to fall out. During their closeness, the knocking returns again, reminding Sarah of what she must face.

Later Jesus talks of wanting to kill Lumumba, the closest thing to Sarah's father. Though Jesus only appears briefly, he seems to be how Sarah really sees herself: stunted, deformed, and needy. He is the last of her inner selves to lose his hair. When he succumbs, Sarah's fate is sealed.

Sarah's relationship to hair is more complicated than the other characters since *Funnyhouse* takes place primarily in her mind. During the play, Sarah says that her "wild kinky hair" is the only part of her physical make-up that would identify her as black.

When she makes her first appearance on stage, a patch of hair is missing from her skull and she wears a hangman's noose. She carries the patch in her hand. This implies that no matter what goes on during the course of the play her fate is inevitable: suicide is her only recourse. When she or any of her inner selves lose their hair, they may be divorced from Sarah's physical racial identity but it does not make her any less black.

Sarah repeatedly says that she wants to "escape the jungle" implying that she wants to be more white. Like her mother before her, she has lost her hair because of the jungle. Sarah says that her mother spent her time in Africa combing her hair after she fell out of love with Sarah's father. Sarah's mother's hair began falling out after he raped her.

This rape may not be literal, but Sarah believes it to be the only explanation for her anger. Hair equals beauty for Sarah, and she cannot forgive her father's legacy.

Sarah longs to fit into white culture, to be pale, even going as far as to claim that her father is dead (he hung himself in a Harlem hotel room, among other scenarios) but his legacy keeps her at a distance. All of her half-truths about him and his fate show how desperately she has tried to avoid her heritage.

Yet Sarah idealizes whites including royalty like Queen Victoria who believes that blacks are evil even though she knows that they are flawed. She wants to be royalty, but the type of hair the Queen and the Duchess have in her subconscious proves that she

knows the truth. They do not provide the solace she seeks. Her "real" white friends, at least depicted here, also do not provide comfort.

The prime example of a white friend is her boyfriend, Raymond. He is a Jewish poet who only likes her because of her race. Sarah says, "I would like to lie and say I love Raymond. But I do not. He is very interested in Negroes."

In the last lines of play, Raymond thinks he knows the truth about his girlfriend: Sarah was a liar, her father is an African-American doctor who is alive, and that he has a white wife (who may or may not be Sarah's mother as depicted in the play). According to Raymond, the truth is that Sarah's father lives the life Sarah says she wants. Perhaps Sarah sees its emptiness and can find no other way to live her life.

At the end of *Funnyhouse,* each of Sarah's four selves wears a halo and talks about what Sarah's father means to them. When she reaches a breaking point, all four of them scream in victory. The knocking is incessant by this point because the real truth is knocking at Sarah's door. For many reasons, she cannot answer it.

Sarah kills herself. The reasons are explained by the use of hair in *Funnyhouse of a Negro.* She did everything she could to get rid of the black part of herself her hair. Until she took her own life, it would not go away.

Source: A. Petrusso, *for Drama for Students,* Gale, 2000.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Barnett discusses Kennedy's play in terms of the psychological theory of projecting one's hope's and fears onto others. This makes others into ideal or persecutory objects respectively, and focuses on treating others as objects rather than as a unified whole.

Adrienne Kennedy's characters speak obsessively of their own births as well as the births which are so often the deaths of their children. Their monologues focus on rape and incest, miscarriage and child murders. Such preoccupations psychologically paralyze the characters, fixing them at and regressing them to a primitive stage in development which Melanie Klein, a psychologist of the British object relations school, calls [in *Introduction to the Work of Melanie Klein* by Hanna Segal] the "paranoid-schizoid position," an infant stage which normally precedes integration. According to Klein, the life instinct and the death instinct, which are both present in the infant from birth, create a polarity of anxieties that the infant deals with through splitting and projective identification; that is, the infant learns to split external objects into representations of good and evil, projecting hopes and fears away from the subject and onto the object. In later phases, the infant learns to unify such splits and to deal with whole objects. Kennedy's characters, however, rarely reach this point of integration: they never progress beyond the paranoid-schizoid position. These characters remain prisoners of object relations, their worlds disordered by irrational, irrevocable splits.

The infantile ego, in terms of Klein's description, deflects the death instinct outward to an external object, the persecutory object, which "is felt to be bad and threatening to the ego, giving rise to a feeling of persecution." At the same time, it projects the libido, or life instinct, outward, thereby creating an ideal object:

The infant's aim is to try to acquire, to keep inside and to identify with the ideal object, seen as life-giving and protective, and to keep out the bad object and those parts of the self which contain the death instinct. The leading anxiety in the paranoid-schizoid position is that the persecutory object or objects will get inside the ego and overwhelm and annihilate both the ideal object and the self.

Klein, according to Hanna Segal, calls this stage the paranoid-schizoid position because the infant's fears demonstrate a paranoia which is characterized by splitting. Kennedy's characters, likewise, attempt to order their anxieties by splitting and projecting them onto persecutory and ideal objects.

Funnyhouse of a Negro, Kennedy's first-published and most famous play, vividly reflects Klein's theories of object relations. The cast of characters includes "Negro-Sarah" and the four "selves" she creates through projective identification: the Duchess of Hapsburg, Queen Victoria Regina, Jesus, and Patrice Lumumba. Other characters include Sarah's Jewish-poet-boyfriend, Raymond, and her landlady, Mrs. Conrad. Sarah's mother appears as an apparition crossing the stage. An author's note at the beginning of the text suggests: ' *'Funnyhouse of a Negro* is perhaps clearest and most explicit when the

play is placed in the girl Sarah's room. The center of the stage works well as her room, allowing the rest of the stage as the place for herselves.... When she is placed in her room with her belongings, then the director is free to let the rest of the play happen around her." Sarah, thus, has split into four majestic selves who occupy the space around her and seemingly take over her world.

When Sarah first appears in the play, she is ' *'a faceless, dark character with a hangman's rope about her neck and red blood on the part that would be her face.*" In the final scene, *"we see her hanging in [her] room."* Rosemary K. Curb suggests [in "Fragmented Selves in Adrienne Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro* and *The Owl Answers*] that this play, "set in the central character's mind, portray [s] the elusive, almost timeless moment just before death, when horrifying images and past events replete with monotonous conversations ka-leidoscopically flash through the memory and imagination of the protagonist." *Funnyhouse of a Negro* is a surrealistic vision of death and oppression, operating on the level of morbid fantasy to depict the mind of a young woman who cannot distinguish the persecutory object from the ideal.

The "action" of the play consists of a series of monologues spoken by Sarah's selves. Even when two appear together, they fail to engage in dialogue; instead, one continues a haunted monotone at the point at which another leaves off. Queen Victoria and the Duchess of Hapsburg meet in the Queen's chamber, but their identities seem questionable: they seem not to know who they are. They speak the lines of Sarah's selves, of British royalty appropriated by a schizoid African-American woman who both represses and projects. They speak of themselves as Duchess and Queen but they speak too of their father in the jungle and the harm he has done their (Sarah's) mother. In subsequent scenes, the selves appear in various combinations, contradicting and corroborating one another's narratives. Sarah's inner world is unstable; the characters who exist outside it, however, are reductive and unresponsive. Mrs. Conrad reduces Sarah's projections to a mundane insanity, offering rational explanations for Sarah's seemingly irrational behavior. Like Mrs. Conrad, Raymond exists both within and outside of Sarah's hallucinations. The *"funnyman of the funny house,*" he tortures Sarah's selves with coldness. His clinical distance borders on sadism and characterizes his attitude throughout the play. In the last scene he discovers Sarah's body and tersely comments: "She was a funny little liar" leaving the audience to wonder whether or not she was a liar at all. Raymond fully embodies the persecutory object, but the four internalized selves present more equivocal positions: they cannot be neatly categorized.

Much has been written of Sarah's "choices" for her projections; most critics agree with Herbert Blau's assertion [in "The American Dream in American Gothic: The Plays of Sam Shepard and Adrienne Kennedy"] that Sarah's is "a psyche formed by white culture which she finds not contemptible but beautiful, more maybe than black is beautiful," and that, as a result, she finds the Queen and Duchess enviable and Patrice Lumumba frightening. "It is [Lumumba]," writes Robert Scanlan [in "Surrealism as Mimesis: A Director's Guide to Adrienne Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro"*], "who separates Sarah from her white ancestry and the white European royalty she so admires. The Duchess of Hapsburg and Queen Victoria are figures of white and female power she would like to identify with, were it not for her Negro hair." Lorraine A. Brown follows this

same line of reasoning [in "For the Characters Are Myself: Adrienne Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro"*]: "If [Sarah] has chosen Victoria and the Duchess of Hapsburg to escape the sense of powerlessness, she has also chosen them, we suspect, to escape the implication of debased sexuality attached to a Black girl." Curb corroborates these theories, writing of all Kennedy's characters: "They are mentally and emotionally torn between their real external Black selves and the glorious dream White selves which they imagine and desire." And Werner Sollors further develops the distinctions between the black and white selves and finds the selves "in sharp, deadly conflict" [in "Owls and Rats in the American Funnyhouse: Adrienne Kennedy's drama"]:

[Kennedy] portrays her central character not as unified or whole but as a collage of multifaceted and contradictory selves (who are not only black and white, or male and female, but also father's daughter and mother's daughter, ruler and martyr, stoic and revolutionary, dead and alive, carnal and spiritual, young and old, hairy and bald, glamorous and humble, or proper and lascivious). The antithesis between Victoria and Lumumba may thus be seen as that between empire and anticolonialism; Jesus and the Duchess of Hapsburg may relate to each other as love and lust; the Duchess and Victoria may represent the conflict between a scandalous and a proper woman; Lumumba and Jesus may embody militancy and forgiveness.

These critics see Sarah's selves as antitheses; they see her inner turmoil caused by the inherent conflicts she embodies. Curb calls Sarah "the battlefield for warring forces forever opposed and terrified of invasion." These theories coincide with Klein's model of splitting and projective identification in which objects are split between good and bad, ideal and persecutory. Sarah splits not objects but selves, to which she attributes both attractive and repulsive qualities. However, Sarah's splitting is not as decisive as she might wish and it is ultimately unsuccessful.

Splitting and projective identification are methods used to order experience, to break it into manageable pieces. Like the infant who divides and deflects, Sarah too strives for integration: "She is attempting to reintegrate by simple assertion a shattered sense of self." Scanlan calls Sarah's story "a heroic attempt at psychic survival" and explains that through her monologues, she attempts to define herself: "She is composing her life with words." Sarah, however, cannot compose herself; she finds integration impossible. Her splitting process differs from that of the normal infant: "In situations of anxiety the split is widened and projection and introjection are used in order to keep persecutory and ideal objects as far as possible from one another, while keeping both of them under control." If Sarah's selves could be divided into bad and good, then she might maintain their separation from one another and control them. In her inherent confusion, however, Sarah cannot separate bad from good, and the manifested selves become no less complex than the original. She projects both persecutory and ideal qualities onto each self, finally causing them to implode and self-destruct.

In Sarah's first monologue she explains that her room is Queen Victoria's chamber: "Partly because it is consumed by a gigantic plaster statue of Queen Victoria who is my idol and partly for other reasons." When she is the Duchess of Hapsburg, she says, she sits opposite Victoria and they talk: "Victoria always wants me to tell her of whiteness.

She wants me to tell her of a royal world where everything and everyone is white and there are no unfortunate black ones." Queen Victoria represents both self and other: sometimes Sarah speaks to her; sometimes she *is* her. The statue itself is an ideal object, one which Sarah wants "to acquire, to keep inside and to identify with"; thus she has purchased the statue, brought it home, and built three steps as its shrine. It is also, however, "bad and threatening to the ego, giving rise to a feeling of persecution" for this statue speaks of eliminating the "unfortunate black ones" of whom Sarah is one. "Raymond says it is a thing of terror, possessing the quality of nightmares, suggesting large and probable deaths. And of course he is right," says Sarah. One death it suggests is her own, and she knows that. Yet she is attracted to the Queen for her power, her propriety, her heritage. Libido meets death in Queen Victori-a in a statue which unifies Sarah's greatest fears and desires and embodies them in *"astonishing repulsive whiteness"* a whiteness signifying both honor and death.

Each of Sarah's four selves is equally multifarious. Patrice Lumumba, an African nationalist leader, was the first prime minister of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (subsequently Zaire); he was assassinated shortly after being forced out of office. Kennedy personally mourned his loss [in *People who Led to My Plays*], which affected her own sense of identity: "Just when I had discovered the place of my ancestors, just when I had discovered this African hero, he had been murdered.... Even though I had known him so briefly, I felt I had been struck a blow. He became a character in my play ... a man with a shattered head." To Kennedy, Lumumba represents the African hero; to Sarah, he represents both the African hero and her father. The Lumumba she projects *"a black man. His head appears to be split in two with blood and tissue in [his} eyes. He carries an ebony mask"* combines her visions of both martyr and oppressor. Like her father, Lumumba is a *"large dark faceless Man,"* and like her father he has attempted to save the African people. However, in his hand he carries her father's murder weapon, as he himself admits: "I [have] bludgeoned my father's face with the ebony mask." In this self, then, Sarah combines her aggressions and her affections toward her father and her African heritage; she does not divide them into two distinct selves. In terms of Sarah's sanity, Lumumba becomes a failed projection; he does not provide separate outlets for pleasure and pain.

Like Lumumba, the Jesus Sarah projects is also maimed. He is characterized as a dwarf (which Scanlan proteste as "reprehensible exploitation of a medical condition"). Jesus is physically diminutive and deformed (by his hunchback). Furthermore, his *"yellow"* skin implies impurity, as if he has been "infected" by jaundice or blackness. Throughout his scenes on stage, he seems to scream as much as talk, and when his hair falls out, he is described as *"hideous."* This Jesus seems physically impotent; one might assume the same of his spirituality. Yet Jesus is considered a savior, even within the context of the play; Sarah's grandmother had wanted her son to *be* Jesus, "to walk in Genesis and save the race." And Sarah wants to be saved. She sees in Jesus her father's dreams but she cannot project these visions into an ideal object. Her father's noble dreams have turned to nightmares, just as Jesus has transformed into a hunchbacked, yellow-skinned dwarf.

The Duchess of Hapsburg, the wife of Austrian archduke Maximilian, is the most ambivalent historical self. Maximilian was appointed Emperor of Mexico, having been duped into thinking the Mexican people wanted a monarchy. When Napoleon III withdrew his troops from Mexico, the Hapsburgs were left at the mercy of the revolutionaries, penniless and desperate. The Duchess set sail for Europe to ask Napoleon III for aid, and when he refused her, she went to Rome to ask the Pope. "In the Vatican, [she] collapsed, drifted away into a nightmare world of schizophrenia" [according to Dorothy Gies McGvigan in *The Hapsburgs}* Back in Mexico, Maximilian was shot as a traitor. These events are dramatized in the 1939 film *Juarez,* in which Bette Davis plays Carlotta and Brian Aherne, Maximilian. The film, which Kennedy admired so much that she took her family to visit the Hapsburgs' home in Mexico, emphasizes the Duchess's power over her husband but also her failures. It was she who had encouraged him to accept the throne of Mexico and it was she who connived in persuading him into keeping it once he discovered the adverse sentiment of the people. Yet she remains a sympathetic figure for two reasons: the first, that she loves her husband immeasurably; the second, that she accepts total responsibility for her actions. When she finds out she cannot bear children, she offers to leave her husband so he can find a wife who can; and when she realizes how Napoleon has turned on them, she sees it as her duty to confront him. The truth, however, is too much for her to bear, and she spends her last days envisioning her husband's death and shrieking his name. The Duchess of Hapsburg seems an odd choice for a figure of female power. She was beautiful and powerful but she was also childless, miserable, and ultimately insane. Onto this conflicted figure Sarah projects her nightmares and fantasies, appropriately united in a figurehead who has flourished and failed.

In the early scene in the Queen's chamber, ravens fly about the room as the two women stand by the bed. They wear royal white gowns to match the white satin curtain, of which we are told, *"parts of it are frayed and look as if it has been gnawed by rats."* They wear white headpieces that fall over their faces, and from *"beneath both their headpieces springs a headful of wild kinky hair."* Sarah's split perception is evident from this image of deathly white and living black. The faces are grotesque:

They look exactly alike and will wear masks or be made up to appear a whitish yellow. It is an alabaster face, the skin drawn tightly over the high cheekbones, great dark eyes that seem gouged out of the head, a high forehead, a full red mouth and a head of frizzy hair. If the characters do not wear a mask then the face must be highly powdered and possess a hard expressionless quality and a stillness as in the face of death.

The Queen and the Duchess, in light of this description, hardly seem enviable. They may once have been "glorious dream White selves," but by now they have been mutilated along with the rest, their deaths more prominent in Sarah's mind than their lives. The fact that they look exactly alike neither like Bette Davis nor Queen Victoria, but both mangled white corpses with bright red lips implies that Sarah has lost sight of who they once were. Rather than absorbing the Queen's and Duchess's personalities into herself, she has projected herself onto them. In their voices she hears her worst fears and in their faces she sees her death. "I want not to be," says Sarah. "I ask

nothing except anonymity." Rather than embellishing herself with the regal powers of these women, she imposes on them her own negation.

Sarah's desire "not to be" seems at odds with her projections, four figures etched into history by both heritage and achievement. Yet in choosing them, she effectively erases them, stripping their identities and their pasts. Death is part of their attraction, for Sarah wishes she too were dead. "My white friends, like myself, will be shrewd, intellectual and anxious for death. Anyone's death," she says, and Patrice Lumumba repeats her words almost exactly. She associates whiteness with death from the expressionless alabaster faces of the Duchess and Queen to the frayed satin nightgown of her mother. The imagery throughout the play is white and black (with red exceptions: the Queen's and the Duchess's lips, the bags of hair, the comb), even the lighting in the Queen's chamber: *"It is set in the middle of the Stage in a strong white LIGHT, while the rest of the Stage is in unnatural BLACKNESS. The quality of the white light is unreal and ugly."* The statue of Queen Victoria is also described as white: *"The figure of Victoria is a sitting figure, one of astonishing repulsive whiteness, suggested by dusty volumes of books and old yellowed walls."* White is a sign of death, suggestive of corrosion and decay. But black is also a sign of death: black ravens fly about the Queen's chamber and the death mask Lumumba carries is ebony. The rooms of Sarah's mind are filled with death; visually, they offer no possibility of life; even the red signifies hair loss, the onslaught of madness.

When Sarah first introduces herself and describes her four rooms, she explains: "These are the places myselves exist in. I know no places. That is, I cannot believe in places." Place, for her, suggests a concreteness which implies potential connections impossible connections:

To believe in places is to know hope and to know the emotion of hope is to know beauty. It links us across a horizon and connects us to the world. I find there are no places only my funnyhouse. Streets are rooms, cities are rooms, eternal rooms. I try to create a space for myselves in cities, New York, the midwest, a southern town, but it becomes a lie.

Sarah feels neither linked nor connected to the world; she feels she does not exist in a concrete place with other people but only in her mind, her "rooms," her funnyhouse. The physical world is closed to her, much as her rooms are closed to the world. Although she physically exists in Mrs. Conrad's rooming house, she does not recognize that location. "Sarah, whose ancestors are all out of place, found herself in a kind of limbo, unable even to 'stay in her place' because there was not one for her." [according to Linda Kintz in *The Subject's Tragedy: Political Poetics, Feminist Theory, and Drama.}* She has begun to erase place as she has begun to erase herself (and herselves), creating a continuum of rooms which, like herselves, are contaminated objects neither ideal nor persecutory, but both ideal and persecutory, the deadly combination. The very spaces suffocate her.

Julia Kristeva [in "Women's Time," in *The Kristeva Reader*, edited by Toril Moi] discusses time and space as respective male and female realms: "And indeed, when

evoking the name and destiny of women, one thinks more of the *space* generating and forming the human species than of *time*, becoming or history." She recalls that for Freud "hysteria was linked to place" and suggests.

Subsequent studies on the acquisition of the symbolic function by children show that the permanence and quality of maternal love condition the appearance of the first spatial references which induce the child's laugh and then induce the entire range of symbolic manifestations which lead eventually to sign and syntax.

Maternal love, then, is a precondition of spatial awareness, laughter, and language. In the context of Kennedy's play, this theory can be directly applied: Sarah's mother never loved her, never recognized her as her own, and Sarah is severely lacking in the skills cited by Kristeva. Her language and her laughter are severely impaired: she finds herself unable to communicate in spite of her speeches, and the laughter in her world is replaced by screams. Space, for her, has become an internal arena, no longer reflective of the external.

Her rejection by her mother and her subsequent social sufferings align Sarah with the characters of Samuel Beckett: "The urge to get 'unborn,' to shrink back to nonexistence... pervades his oeuvre." [according to Bennett Simon in "The Fragmented Self, the Reproduction of the Self, and Reproduction in Beckett and in the Theater of the Absurd," in *The World of Samuel Beckett,* edited by J.H. Smith]. Mouth, the speaking character in Beckett's *Not I*, shares a great deal in common with Sarah. The deficiencies Kristeva describes are prominent in Mouth, who does not differentiate between signifiers and their referents: if the mouth is hers, it is her. She projects her whole self onto this "object" much as Sarah projects her whole self and not merely the ideal or the persecutory onto herselves, so that, like Sarah, Mouth has no chance for integration. Beckett's old woman, like Sarah, is a prisoner of object relations; she has split herself in two, reducing herself to an incessantly speaking Mouth and a silent Auditor. Bennett Simon, in his discussion relating Bion's theories of object relations to Beckett's plays, concludes [in "The Imaginary Twins: The Case of Beckett and Bion"]: "Bion's theory-making is instigated by the problems posed by patients who cancel out the distinction between animate and inanimate by making everything inanimate and concrete. These patients practise the opposite of primitive animism they infuse all living things with the quality of death." In support of this theory, the old woman splits herself into two "objects" which forebode death: the detached mouth and its silent, hooded auditor. Likewise, Sarah bedecks herselves with death masks and blood; however, hers is a two-step process. She must bring her historical figures to life before she can kill them.

"The counterpoint between stage and text," writes Paul Lawley [in "Counterpoint, Absence and the Medium in Beckett's *Not I*"] of Beckett's *Not I,* "enacts the play's fundamental conflict: between the need to deny the imperfect self and to maintain, even in agony, a fictional other, and the wish for oblivion which would come with the acknowledgment of the fragmented self." This sentence could apply equally well to *Funnyhouse of a Negro,* in which Sarah's denial of herself (of her past, of her guilt) conflicts with her creation of herselves. Lawley argues that the striking stage image of Beckett's play contradicts the Mouth's desire not to be: there she is. She is, however,

much reduced. Sarah, on the contrary, has been multiplied. While trying to erase herself, she has instead created four repetitions. Sarah's hallucinations are of a grand scale while Mouth's are minuscule. Yet they share a common goal of self-obliteration, and they share a common sadness that they were not aborted before birth. In his essay "The Fragmented Self, the Reproduction of the Self, and Reproduction in Beckett and in the Theatre of the Absurd," Simon focuses on such processes of splitting and fragmentation as peculiar aspects of modernism: "[I]n the twentieth century... the self is disintegrated, deconstructed, shadowed, fragmented, submerged, unstable, and scarcely able to tell a coherent story." He correlates these self-destructive processes with modern and postmodern concerns about reproduction: "The modern problematic of the self goes hand in glove with a set of modern concerns and anxieties about conception and contraception." Such anxieties, which clearly dominate the writing of both Kennedy and Beckett, link together playwrights of absurdist drama: "The theatre of the absurd is a dramatic culture that has been marked from its beginning with a preoccupation with birth and reproduction."

"Funnyhouse of a Negro... grows out of the absurdist and expressionist traditions yet forges a style of its own." [according to David Willinger in the Review of *Funnyhouse of a Negro....]* Kennedy's writing is ultimately original, incorporating absurdist elements yet creating something very different. Her play lacks the humor and the sense of the ludicrous which characterize the absurd; her characters' detachment is not ironical but imposed. Their world is not fundamentally without meaning, but such meaning is deliberately withheld. Here, feelings of detachment are not philosophical but physical, resulting from mortal violence. "An important part of the absurd," according to Simon, "is the sense of being cut off from the roots and, as a usually unstated corollary, of having no branches, no offshoots, no descendants." Kennedy's characters, to the contrary, feel very much attached to their roots roots which shackle and suffocate them. They have too many roots, knotted, tangled roots which pull them in opposing directions, like the life and death instincts which divide them. These women are bound by their roots; and their bond reflects not only love, but hate. For in the world of these plays, blood is a sign of guilt and birth is a result of rape. Sarah wishes to extricate herself from her roots, but she simultaneously enmeshes herself in their web. The past like every aspect of her life embodies both persecutory and ideal.

Sarah transforms her world into a house of mirrors where she watches herselves in the glass; she becomes an outsider observing her life. She speaks objectively and emotionlessly about herself and seems detached from her past even as she recreates it, never mentioning the noose on her neck or her imminent death. She speaks in the present tense of what was and gives her past to her four historical projections in hopes of self-eradication. Instead, her voice is multiplied by four, her image refracted by funnyhouse mirrors which trap her amidst their reflections.

Source: Claudia Barnett, "A Prison of Object Relations: Adrienne Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro,*" in *Modern Drama,* Fall, 1997, Vol. 40, no. 3, pp. 374-84.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, Meigs treats Sarah's multiple selves as masks that represent an imprisonment that keeps Sarah, like many African-American women, from having the power "to resolve the chaotic elements of their black female identities."

I know no places. That is I cannot believe inplaces. To believe in places is to know hope and to know the emotion of hope is to know beauty. It links us across a horizon and connects us to the world. I find there are noplaces only my funnyhouse

Adrienne Kennedy, *Funnyhouse of a Negro*

In 1960, while dramatists were forging a rhetoric of black theater from the emerging black power movement, twenty-nine-year-old Adrienne Kennedy travelled to Africa with her husband and son. The trip would prove to be the catalyst for her career as one of America's most complex contemporary playwrights. At the time of her trip, Kennedy had been writing stories and plays for nearly ten years and had received virtually no public attention. Her failure to establish herself as a writer was made more discouraging by the recognition her husband Joseph Kennedy received for his work in social psychology at Columbia. She felt increasingly [in *People Who Led to My Plays*] that she "was just accompanying another person as he lived out his dreams" and that she had acquiesced "to another person's desires, dreams and hopes." As she struggled to maintain her identity as a black woman author and attempted to invest herself in the Western literary tradition she embraced, Kennedy grew conscious of a buried African heritage. Africa opened to her a world of black artists and leaders, like Congo Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba, to match and challenge the Western literary figures and rulers she admired. The conflict between these two ancestral traditions would become one of the primary themes in Kennedy's complex, surrealistic psychodramas.

Although her rhetoric maintains a political agenda, albeit one aimed more at expressing black women's struggles, Kennedy's method draws from the mythic elements of traditional African ritual drama, particularly the Kuntu form described by Paul Carter Harrison. Ritual drama empowers its participants as they negotiate their roles within its theatrical community. Kennedy discovered, however, that these roles, designated like those in many black protest groups by men, fail to allow female participants self-determination. This dissonance in the fragmented black family/community impedes the collective expression of harmony required of ritual theater. "Having been fractionalized, [the black American's] rituals are often played out in a spiritual vacuum, [her] energies dissipated without the generative feedback of a stable society." [according to P.C. Harrison in *The Drama ofNommo.}* Kennedy's plays address the cultural and political fragmentation of black Americans that occurs when a dominant (white) social structure interrupts efforts to construct a black community.

Kennedy uses this damaged social identity in her plays as a symptom of the deeper psychological fragmentation black women suffer. Kennedy particularly uses the mask, a traditional symbol of power and mystery, as a device to develop what Michael Goldman

[in *The Actor's: Toward a Theory of Drama}* calls "the double movement of dramatic elation both escape from self and self-discovery." Kennedy undermines this empowerment and elation, however, and transforms the mask into an image of imprisonment and terror. Many of her characters become trapped in the mask's freakish impersonality and are unable either to discover themselves fully or to escape from the horrifying selves they do discover.

In three of Kennedy's plays, *Funnyhouse of a Negro* (1964), *The Owl Answers* (1965), and *A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White* (1976), the protagonists are black women who fail to unite the fragmented elements of their identities into harmonic, dynamic wholes. Their equally fragmented communities have failed to provide them with the ritual means for locating themselves and have made them feel guilty for recognizing the extra measure of alienation assigned to black women. These characters represent the community of women, largely excluded from the political mechanisms of black protest, who are nonetheless expected to sacrifice gender issues for racial concerns. In these three one-act plays, Kennedy exposes how black Americans, especially women, having been denied a social context and history, are therefore powerless to resolve the chaotic elements of their black female identities.

In *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, Sarah seeks to find herself among four historical figures who share her voice: Queen Victoria, the Duchess of Hapsburg, Jesus, and Patrice Lumumba. Although she lives in a brownstone with her Jewish boyfriend, she mentally inhabits the expressionistic settings suggested by these figures. After her mad mother introduces the play's action, Sarah and her selves confront her fear that her father will find and rape her as he did her mulatto mother. She imagines his various fates, including one in which she bludgeons him with an ebony mask. Herself a mulatto, Sarah's conflicting racial histories are illustrated but never resolved by the figures that serve as her masks. Far from empowering her, these character masks trap Sarah in a role of self-hatred, fear, and the inability to integrate her personality that leads to her suicide.

Kennedy introduces the mask motif in the play's first sequence. Sarah's mad mother passes before the closed curtain wearing an eyeless yellow mask that renders her not only blind but faceless. She gropes across the stage in a dreamlike state we later learn is death, separated from the "life" of the play only by the rat-eaten shroud of a white stage curtain. She carries before her a bald head, an image of weakness that recurs as Sarah's selves lose their wild, kinky hair throughout the play. Although Kennedy later introduces a bald head that drops and hangs from the ceiling to indicate the martyrdom of Christ and Lumumba, the baldness of Victoria and the Duchess is more "hideous" and frightening because it links them to Sarah's dead mother. For Sarah, baldness indicates not only death but also a life of repulsion, vulnerability, and madness. As her female selves lose their hair, the threat of her father's return, of a confrontation with her irreconcilable blackness, grows imminent. Unable to cope with the jungle's darkness, Sarah attempts to hide herself in a white city.

During the course of the play, two historical characters who represent her white heritage assume Sarah's psychological narrative. These alter-egos, Queen Victoria and the

Duchess of Hapsburg, also wear white, expressionless death masks and are cast in a strong white light that contrasts with the stage's unnatural darkness. These other selves express Sarah' s thoughts while the connotations of their historical identities comment on them. The sense of power and authority evoked by the two European rulers cannot be appropriated properly by Sarah, who is neither white nor black. Their imperialistic implications comment on the extent of Sarah's psychological oppression, one history a victim of the other. Nonetheless, she spends her days writing poetry that imitates Edith Sitwell's and dreaming of living in a white, European culture. She attempts to efface her black heritage not only by "killing" her father but by injecting herself into white society. She claims [in *Funnyhouse of a Negro*] to need these white figures "as an embankment to keep me from reflecting too much upon the fact that I am a Negro. For, like all educated Negroes... I find it necessary to maintain a stark fortress against recognition of myself." The expressionless masks of the two rulers serve both to identify an aspect of Sarah's historical identity and to alienate her from it. In the play's final scene, Sarah is discovered hanging from the ceiling of her "funnyhouse" as the lights come up on the white plaster statue of Queen Victoria. Enshrined in Sarah's room, she is finally reduced to a voiceless, immobile image of "astonishing repulsive whiteness." When Sarah dies, the masked figures that have given body to her voice are stripped of their narrative power. They become hollowed references to a history that is finally unavailable to Sarah.

The persona of Patrice Lumumba, whom Sarah both adopts and associates with her father, differs from the first two in that he is black and carries rather than wears his ebony mask. Because Lumumba acts as a bridge between Sarah and her father, he represents both the black man's noble efforts to save his race and her inescapable and damning blackness. Lumumba, murdered by African radicals who smashed his skull, appears in the play with a split and bleeding head. At one point, as Sarah explains how she killed her father, she confuses him with Lumumba: "No, Mrs. Conrad, he did not hang himself, that is only the way they understood it, they do, but the truth is that I bludgeoned his head with an ebony skull that he carries about with him. Wherever he goes, he carries out black masks and heads." Sarah's previous statements about her desires to integrate into white society are repudiated by an unidentified black man who recalls Lumumba because he too carries his mask: "I am a nigger of two generations. I am Patrice Lumumba.... I am the black shadow that haunted my mother's conception. ... It is my vile dream to live in rooms with European antiques and my statue of Queen Victoria."

Because Sarah is a mulatto, she cannot wear the masks of both the Negro and the white woman simultaneously. As the mask signifies the character's fragmented identity, the mulatto bastard becomes a metaphor for the black woman's alienation from her gender and her race. Sarah attempts to reconcile her identity as a mulatto by claiming to have murdered her black father. She is unable to conceal her hatred of him for literally blackening her family. Sarah conflates her story with his story as she recalls how her grandmother encouraged her father to become a black Messiah. Sarah believes he betrayed her wish and his future family by marrying a light-toned woman with "hair as straight as any white woman's." His mother "hoped he would be Christ but he failed. He had married [Sarah's] mother because he could not resist the light. Yet, his mother from

the beginning in the kerosene lamp of their dark rooms in Georgia said, 'I want you to be Jesus, to walk in Genesis and save the race, return to Africa, find revelation in the black.'" To fulfill his mother's vision, he takes his white wife to Africa to pursue mission work. There she "falls out of live" with him and slowly goes mad, symbolized by her gradual hair loss. He rapes her when she denies him access to the marriage bed because he is black and creates a legacy of violence, madness, and failure for their daughter Sarah. "'Forgiveness for my being black, Sarah. I *know* you are a child of torment.... *Forgive my blacknessV* her father pleads. But Sarah can neither accept nor escape her own blackness: "before I was born," she laments, "he haunted my conception, diseased my birth."

Sarah seeks to neutralize her blackness by living with her white boyfriend, Raymond Mann, whom she wishes she could love but doesn't, in an apartment run by a white landlady, Mrs. Conrad. These two white characters in Sarah's "funnyhouse" are modelled after the looming clownlike figures that guard an amusement park in Kennedy's hometown, Cleveland. The set for the scene in which Raymond and the Duchess of Haps-burg engage in a bizarre exchange includes a backdrop of mirrors, revealed only as Raymond alternately opens and closes the blinds that conceal them. The flashing mirrors recall the disorienting nightmare quality of what is ironically called a funnyhouse. Raymond and Mrs. Conrad laugh, in accordance with their roles as funnyhouse guards, at Sarah's bewilderment and failure to distinguish herself from her historical reflections. They mock her attempts to gain self-knowledge and control over the conflicting elements of her persona. When she is unable to do so, Sarah hangs herself. After discovering her body, Mrs. Conrad and Raymond suggest that Sarah's father is not dead but lives in a white suburb with a white prostitute. He and his "whore" join the other white characters in the funnyhouse who, in refusing to understand or sympathize with Sarah's internal struggle, derive ironic amusement from her desperate suicide." 'She was a funny little liar,'" Raymond comments as he observes her hanging figure. Mrs. Conrad can only offer the unsympathetic remark, " 'The poor bitch has hung herself!'" Sarah, ultimately powerless to reconcile and integrate her conflicting selves and incongruent historical narratives, chooses to abandon the white funnyhouse. That Sarah recognizes no escape other than suicide testifies to the insidi-ousness of her tragedy. Unable to move beyond feebly articulating her oppression, Sarah can neither appropriate the power of her masks, as Harrison might suggest, nor follow the mandate of Amiri Baraka' s militant theater to create white-free spaces for blacks. To excise her whiteness would leave Sarah vulnerable to a terrifying blackness she cannot control. .. .

Source: Susan E. Meigs, "No Place but the Funnyhouse: The Struggle for Identity in Three Adrienne Kennedy Plays," in *Modern American Drama: The Female Canon*, edited by June Schlueter, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1990, pp. 172-183.

Critical Essay #4

In the following essay, Brown sees the play as a world in which "Blackness, femaleness, and education are equally important isolating factors."

For the days are past when there are places and characters with connections with themes as in the stories you pick up on the shelves of public libraries. . . . There is no theme. No statements. . . . For the statement is the characters and the characters are myself.

These words spoken by Sarah, the young Negro student, in Adrienne Kennedy's play, *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, apply both to Sarah's own troubled personal world and to the felicitous form of the play itself. An ornate dramatic image, reflecting kinship with and absorption of the work of Samuel Beckett and Jean Genet, this original and penetrating play makes use of surrealistic and expressionistic modes to explore the mind and emotions of an educated Black girl. The play projects a world, in fact, where Blackness, femaleness, and education are equally important isolating factors. This exploration is accomplished structurally by the creation of a rich montage of images and impressions which appear, fade, and recur. The action takes the form of separate scenes made up of monologues, dialogues, or pantomimes, and identical grotesque figures dressed up in cheap white satin also move across the stage, sometimes shouting, sometimes screaming, carrying their bald skulls before them. The scenes occur at various levels and specific areas of the stage, which are illuminated and blacked out as the play proceeds. All of the characters except for Sarah and her father appear in white face, and the stage directions indicate the use of masks or yellow-white makeup to suggest a "hard expressionless quality" (Kennedy) a stillness akin to death. The nightmare effect thus created by the expert use of these various dramatic resources provide the ideal means to depict the increasing terror, anguish, and fragmentation of Sarah's hallucinatory world.

When the play opens, Sarah's personality is split into four characters who represent various sides of herself: Queen Victoria, the Duchess of Hapsburg, Jesus, and Patrice Lumumba. Sarah, like Genet's characters, has chosen powerful roles which reflect political as well as spiritual dimensions. In her room, however, her creative energies find an outlet in the solitary and fruitless task of filling white pages with poetry in imitation of *Edith* Sitwell. Sarah's strenuous efforts to achieve wholeness and identity, and her concurrent contest with paranoia, self-hatred, and the will to self-destruction, ultimately result in a disintegration of her personality. But before that occurs, we observe the considerable force of her will, reminiscent of Samuel. Beckett's Winnie who also struggles so valiantly to stay in control and fend off madness. That we are allowed to experience this play from within Sarah's mind and sensibility and that the form of the play so noticeably aids our understanding of her struggle are only two measures of its fineness. Equally brilliant is the deep probing of the female psyche which reaches an admirable level of universality; Miss Kennedy demonstrates that Sarah's struggle is the struggle of all women in a world which not only mocks and rejects Blackness but femaleness as well. For the play is not about Sarah's Blackness alone, but about the

combination of Blackness, femaleness, and education, which together create insurmountable barriers to wholeness and psychic balance. For each of these aspects of her consciousness only serves to increase her sense of herself as an outsider and outcast.

Central in her struggle for psychic health is the conflict which stems from her attachment to parental figures. In the first scene in the play, Sarah, as Queen Victoria, tells us that she is "tied to a black Negro" who is her father. He haunted her conception and diseased her birth, she says, and in her fantasies he returns from the jungle to find her. The father is associated in the play with bestiality, the death of her mother, and "a nigger pose of agony," but his Blackness is also identified in her mind with Africa and the need for "the Black man to make a pure statement" (Kennedy) and to rise from colonialism. One of the sides of herself is Patrice Lumumba, an indication that she has reflected on and imagined a central role for herself in the African struggle for independence. That the role is a masculine one obviously complicates the problem. For she must determine just what role an educated American Black woman has in the changing African world. Identification with this powerful male also reflects her desire to escape the powerlessness and passivity associated with being a woman. Again the problem of identification is complicated by the fact that her mother's whiteness was counteracted by her sex and her father's sex by his Blackness. This dilemma helps to explain the existence of both Queen Victoria and Patrice Lumumba in her fantasy life, a dialectic involving the widely divergent worlds of Victorian England on the one hand and the jungles of Africa on the other.

In vivid contrast to the ambivalent feelings associated with her Black father, Sarah's preoccupation with memories of her mother leads her toward the world of whiteness and concern with her own physical resemblance to that fair-skinned, gray-eyed woman with hair as straight as any white woman's. Her mother, too, haunts her. She returns in Sarah's nightmares, her bald skull shining, claiming that her baldness is a result of her rape by Sarah's father. "My Mother was the light. She was the lightest one. She looked like a white woman," Sarah-Victoria says (Kennedy). But for the girl with pale yellow skin, it is clear that identification with her mother and whiteness and rejection of her father (her one defect, she tells us, is her "unmistakably Negro kinky hair" [Kennedy]) is a move toward death. Such identification ties her to her memories of the past, helps her to evade the question of her own identity, and inhibits any growth or development. Instead it encourages her to isolate herself, to hide in her room where she dreams of living in rooms with European antiques, photographs of Roman ruins, and oriental carpets. The language Sarah uses to describe this dream reflects her tension and her straining for extreme control. The images she uses describes a state of siege: white friends to act as *embankments* to protect her from reflecting on her Blackness; a *stark fortress* against recognition of herself. However, even these white friends she distrusts, for they, like she, are preoccupied with death, anyone's death.

In her more intimate relationships, Sarah's search for love and acceptance in the white world offers her no solace or comfort. She admits she doesn't love the Jewish poet, Raymond, and he doesn't love her. He is only "very interested" in Negroes. In the scene with Raymond, when Sarah is the Duchess of Hapsburg, always freer in her behavior

than Victoria, Miss Kennedy adeptly portrays Sarah's masochism. She responds wildly to Raymond's embrace, even though he is unmoved by her fears and torments, as she hears her father returning from the jungle to find her. During the scene she sits before him partially disrobed and clings to his leg, while he laughs, stares at her, and opens and closes the blinds. Disarmed and unprotected, an archetypal fallen woman, she pleads for love from the "ghostly thin" poet with black sores on his face. At other times Raymond becomes in her mind a huge grotesque amusement park funnyman who, together with her white landlady, mocks her and fills the funnyhouse world with contemptuous laughter.

If Sarah lacks significant relationships, she also lacks places to live. For to believe in places is to know hope and to know beauty, and beauty, she reasons, links one to the world and life. She disowns such connections; she prefers isolation. Consequently, Sarah knows only the places her selves exist in: a chamber in a Victorian castle, a Hapsburg chamber, the jungle, and the room where she killed her father. Her own small room is "consumed" by a seated figure of Queen Victoria, "a thing of astonishing whiteness, possessing the quality of nightmare" (Kennedy). Three steps lead to the statue, which presides opposite her door, and the room is filled with dark old volumes, a narrow bed and, on the wall, old photographs of castles and monarchs of England. The irony of Sarah's identification and empathy with the literary and historical traditions of England is brought out even more fully and explicitly in Miss Kennedy's play *The Owl Answers*. There Clara Passmore, a soft-spoken Negro school teacher from Savannah, who identifies with her white father, is cruelly rejected by Chaucer, Shakespeare, and William the Conquerer when she tries to gain entrance to St. Paul's chapel to retrieve the body of her white father. As guards, these three significant figures in Western culture (William the Conquerer had been her father's favorite) call her bastard, and ask her why, if she is Negro, she has any claim to her white father, the richest white man in Jacksonville, Georgia. This episode dramatizes most effectively the dissonance created by the devoted espousal of the cultural heritage of her white father and her own humiliating experiences of rejection and scorn from those she most venerates. We remember the forlorn figure of Clara Passmore standing alone outside of the locked Tower gates which have just been slammed shut in her face. The image describes just as effectively Sarah's isolation and alienation from the white cultural world.

Sarah's own choice of the awesome figure of Queen Victoria as one of her selves strikes us, as Samuel Beckett's Winnie would say, as being "in the old style." If she has chosen Victoria and the Duchess of Hapsburg to escape the sense of power-lessness, she has also chosen them, we suspect, to escape the implications of debased sexuality attached to a Black girl. One of Clara Passmore's selves, for instance, is the Virgin Mary, and yet in the summer in Harlem, she picks up strange men on the subway and takes them to her room to love a dramatic internalization, one suspects, of stereotyping which divides women into saints and whores, and just as automatically attributes the role of whore to Black women. In her discussions and associations with Victoria, Sarah momentarily escapes this stigma by rejecting all Blackness. As the Duchess of Hapsburg, she actively seeks debasement by wooing Raymond.

Sarah's own spiritual link with God is, interestingly, Jesus Christ, and not the Virgin Mary. It is the second instance in the play of her identification with a male role, but this time Jesus is a yellow-skinned hunchback dwarf dressed in white rags and sandals. Sarah's ambivalence about him is reflected in her treatment of him as the Duchess of Hapsburg. In her chandeliered ballroom with its black and white marble floor, the Duchess uses the same indifference and coldness as Raymond used to reject her earlier in the play. Later, as the snow falls outside, they sit on a bench in the chamber combing each other's hair, growing hideous together. In their last scene together, Sarah, as Jesus, admits to attempting flag to escape being Black by claiming God as her father, and she vows to go to Africa to kill Patrice Lumumba because she recognizes that her father was a Black man. This intention to murder Lumumba is expressed, she says, without fear, for whatever she does she does in the name of God, Albert Saxe-Coburg, and Queen Victoria a signal that her fantasy life has won out, that she is unable to accept her Blackness, and that her suicide is near.

Symbolically then the appropriate place for Sarah's final disintegration is the jungle. The stage directions indicate that "the jungle has overgrown all the other chambers and all the other places with a violence and a dark brightness, a grim yellowness" (Kennedy). The scene, the longest in the play, moves slowly, as in the last stages of a dream. All of Sarah's selves appear, Jesus arriving first, a nimbus above his head. The other selves wear nimbuses, too, and they wander about speaking at the same time, repeating each other's words, chanting motifs connected with Sarah's suffering, until the tension reaches fever pitch. After an intense silence a reen-actment of her father's murder occurs: the light grows bright and Sarah's mother comes smiling toward her as Sarah bludgeons her father with an ebony head. At this point the selves suddenly run about, madly laughing and shouting, creating by their words and actions a terrifying image of her complete collapse.

Miss Kennedy brings us back, in the final scene of the play, to Sarah's room, where her figure of Queen Victoria presides in all of its repulsive whiteness. There sounds again the eternal knocking which has echoed and re-echoed in the play, and suddenly her father's Black figures "with bludgeoned hands rush upon her" as the lights go dark (Kennedy). When they come up again, the laughing landlady is visible, as well as Sarah's hanging figure. Joined by Raymond, the landlady remarks, "the poor bitch has hung herself (Kennedy). Their brutal exchange establishes at that moment an astonishing counterpoint to our own feelings of shock and outrage. The image of Sarah, that young yet ancient Negro figure, hanging amidst her dusty volumes and old yellow walls, is one that remains long in the mind. For her inability to resist the pressures of society and to resolve the conflicts which raged within her is a vivid reminder of the fragile nature of all psychic balance. Her death also emphasizes the perils of wish-fulfillment, evasion, and escape as methods of alleviating the anguish of the present moment. Even if such impulses stem quite understandably from the enormity of the problems and the intensity of the suffering, they are addictive and crippling, and Miss Kennedy reminds us of the age-old necessity of possessing one's own soul. Her view that the modern world is oblivious, if not downright hostile, to spiritual struggles links her work to that of many others writing for the contemporary theater. That her plays have

gone unheralded and unappreciated is unfortunate, for Miss Kennedy is undoubtedly one of the foremost playwrights in America today.

Source: Lorraine A. Brown, "'For the Characters Are Myself: Adrienne Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro,*" in *Negro American Literature Forum,* 1975, Vol. 9, pp. 86-88.

Topics for Further Study

Research the Civil Rights movement of the early 1960s, in particular the effects of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. How do you think this movement impacted the lives of middle-class African Americans like Sarah?

Review psychological writings on the children of interracial marriages. Discuss Sarah's identity crisis, self-hatred, and subsequent suicide in light of your findings. Has society changed? Would Sarah feel this way today?

The character of Sarah feels alienated from both her African-American heritage and white heritage. Write an essay discussing your own heritage and what it means to you. Does it help define who you are? What else defines you as a person?

Compare and contrast the character of Sarah with Clara from Kennedy's 1965 play *The Owl Answers.* Clara undergoes a similar racial identity crisis, which also involves historical figures. Why did Kennedy pick these specific people what do they represent? What do the historical figures say about Sarah and Clara's individual crises?

Compare and Contrast

1964: The poll tax is eliminated by the ratification of the twenty-fourth amendment to the Constitution. Throughout the summer, many volunteers travel to Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia to promote voting rights among African Americans. In Mississippi, three civil rights activists are murdered.

Today: The right to vote is assured to African Americans.

1964: Interracial marriages are banned by sixteen states, mostly in the South.

Today: No state bans interracial marriages.

1964: Anti-apartheid leader Nelson Mandela is sentenced to life in prison for his activities in South Africa.

Today: After being imprisoned for twenty-six years, Mandela was released in 1990. He was elected as South Africa's president in 1994. He has since retired from public life.

What Do I Read Next?

for colored girls who have considered suicide/ when the rainbow is enuf is a dramatic poem written by Ntozake Shange in 1974. Shange explores different facets of her life and struggles, relating a variety of experiences of African American women in the twentieth century.

Black, White, Other: Biracial Americans Talk About Race and Identity (1995) is a book by Lisa Funderburg that features interviews with forty-three biracial Americans. They discuss the impact of being biracial on their lives.

The Owl Answers is a play written by Kennedy in 1965. It chronicles the adventures of a young woman, Clara Passmore, who is troubled by her racial identity. Eventually, Passmore is imprisoned by several figures in British history, including William the Conqueror.

Of Many Colors: Portraits of Multiracial Families, is a collection of photographs and interviews by Gigi Kaeser, Peggy Gillespie and Glen-da Valentine published in 1997. The thirty-nine portraits are accompanied by the stories of these multiracial families.

Further Study

Binder, Wolfgang. "A MELUS Interview with Adrienne Kennedy," in *MELUS: The Journal of the Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States,* Fall, 1985, p. 99.

This interview with Kennedy includes a discussion of race, culture, and her artistic development.

Bryant-Jackson, Paul K. and Lois More Overbeck, eds. *Intersecting Boundaries: The Theatre of Adrienne Kennedy,* University of Minnesota Press, 1992, 254 p.

A collection of critical essays on Kennedy's plays.

Farber, David R. *The Age of Great Dreams: America in the 1960s,* Hill & Wang, 1994, 296 p.

A historical overview of the 1960s, Farber's book covers political, social, and cultural history, including the civil rights movement.

Kennedy, Adrienne. *People Who Led to My Plays*, Alfred A. Knopf, 1997, 125 p.

A nontraditional autobiography that uses vignettes and photographs from Kennedy's life to explore her influences and interests.

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Clurman, Harold. A review, in *The Nation,* February 10, 1964, p. 154.

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BOOKRAGS

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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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