Krapp's Last Tape Study Guide

Krapp's Last Tape by Samuel Beckett

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Introduction

In Bob Dylan's "When I Paint My Masterpiece" (1971), the speaker expresses his weariness from ages of artistic trials as well as his excitement at the prospect of creating what will be his greatest work of art:

Oh, the hours I've spent inside the Coliseum,/ Dodging lions and wastin' time / Oh, those mighty kings of the jungle, I could hardly stand to see em. / Yes it sure has been a long, hard climb... / Someday, everything is gonna be smooth like a rhapsody / When I paint my masterpiece. / Someday, everything is gonna be different / When I paint my masterpiece.

Like the speaker of Dylan's song, the protagonist of *Krapp's Last Tape* is also certain that he possesses the talent to change the world with his art but the focus of Beckett's play is how Krapp's certainty is worn down to a terrible moment of doubt and despair. Krapp ultimately realizes that *nothing* will ever be different and that his masterpiece has had no effect whatsoever in the world. The fact that Krapp wasted his life in pursuit of such a grandiose "vision" (as he calls it) marks the play as one of Beckett's most ironic and chilling works.

Like all of Beckett's work, *Krapp's Last Tape* may strike the first-time viewer as odd and unsettling: there is a minimal set, no dramatic lighting cues, nothing that a theatergoer would call a traditional "plot," and only one character a character whose only conversations are with a tape recording of himself that he made thirty years ago. However, many of the play's original reviewers noted the force that Beckett was able to contain in what initially seems like the framework (rather than the final draft) of a play. For example, writing in the *New Republic,* Robert Brustein praised Beckett's portrait of "impotent desire" and his ability to capture the futility of Krapp' s dreams of himself as an artist; to him, Krapp is a balance of "pathos and absurdity" that reveals the "vacuity" of our human desire to achieve greatness. While other critics dismissed the play as too artificially constructed and self-conscious, many saw it as indicative of Beckett's skill as a dramatist. In recent years, a number of biographers of Beckett (by authors such as Deirdre Bair (1978), James Knowlson (1996) and Anthony Cronin (1997)) have praised *Krapp's Last Tape* as a play which explores the isolated nature of human existence while, simultaneously, avoiding (according to Deirdre Bair) "the searing, wrenching pain and exhaustion" of Beckett's previous work. The play remains one of Beckett's major plays (along with *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*) and was directed by Beckett himself on several occasions.

Author Biography

Samuel Barclay Beckett was born at Cooldrinagh (his family's home) in Foxrock, a town in County Dublin, Ireland; although there is some confusion over the true date of his birth, Beckett always held that he was born on Good Friday, 13 April 1906. A talented athlete, Beckett's body developed as steadily as his mind: after completing secondary school, Beckett entered Trinity College, Dublin, where he excelled in French and Italian. In 1928, he moved to Paris to study and teach at the Ecole Normal Superieure this move to Paris was a key event in Beckett's life, for he lived the rest of it almost exclusively in France.

While in Paris, Beckett met and befriended James Joyce, the Irish poet, short-story writer, and novelist, who was then composing *Finnegans Wake,* a difficult novel that Beckett helped its author translate into French. While working with Joyce, Beckett composed "Dante ... Bruno. Vico ... Joyce" (1929), his first foray into criticism. His own work soon followed: "Whoroscope" (1930), a poem about the nature of time, *Proust* (1931) an examination of the great French novelist, and *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (1932, published 1993), his first novel, parts of which were revised into a collection of short stories titled *More Pricks than Kicks* and published, to almost no audience, in 1934.

Trouble with publishers and sales did not dissuade Beckett, however, from further projects. In 1938 his novel *Murphy* was published to mixed reviews (it had been previously rejected by forty-two publishers). Once World War II began, Beckett found little time to write and worked with a cell of the French Resistance; he narrowly escaped capture by the Gestapo on more than one occasion. He composed much of the novel *Watt* (published 1953) during this time.

After the war, Beckett began a period of fruitful composition, writing in French and then translating his work into English. Although his first play, *Eleutheria*, was composed in 1947 but not published until after Beckett's death, his second play, *Waiting for Godot,* (published 1952, first produced 1953) proved to be Beckett's most discussed, analyzed, and talked-about work; the play concerning a pair of tramps who wait in an unspecified place for a man named Godot who may or may not exist and does not ever arrive caused great controversy when brought to the United States in 1956. His famous trilogy of novels, *Molloy, Malone Dies, and The Unnamable,* were also composed during this period; all three were published in English by 1958.

For the rest of his life, Beckett continued to write in French and experiment with both prose and dramatic forms. His next major play, *Endgame* (published 1957), concerns a blind autocrat, trapped in a room with his parents who reside in dustbins; *Krapp's Last Tape* depicts an old man listening to a thirty-year-old recording of himself; *Happy Days* (1961) features a woman who delivers a long monologue while simultaneously being buried up to her neck in a mound of earth. Other experimental work followed, such as the television play *Eh, Joe?* (1966), the thirty-five-seconds-long *Breath* (1970) and the novel *Mercier and Camier* (1970). In 1969, Beckett was awarded the Nobel Prize for

Literature; the following year marked the publication of his *Collected Works* in sixteen volumes. During the last phase of his career, Beckett continued to intrigue (and occasionally frustrate) audiences and readers with the prose works *Worstward Ho* (1983), *Stirrings Still* (1991), and *Nohow On* (1993) and the plays *Footfalls* (1976), *Rockabye* (1981), and *Ohio Impromptu* (1981). Beckett died at home in France on December 22,1989. He has come to be regarded as one of the giants of twentieth-century literature and, as the title of Anthony Cronin's 1996 book suggests, "The Last Modernist."

Plot Summary

The action of *Krapp's Last Tape* occurs on "a late evening in the future" in the title character's den. Specifically, the play takes place on Krapp's sixty-ninth birthday. Every year since he was twenty-four, Krapp a would-be writer who has failed as such has recorded his impressions of the previous year and then catalogued the resulting tape's number and contents in a ledger, which he keeps locked in his desk. The play depicts Krapp listening to a tape from thirty years ago (recorded when he was thirty-nine) and then recording this year's tape.

When the play begins, Krapp is sitting at his desk, consulting his watch to confirm that the exact time of his birth is approaching this is when he will record this year's impressions. There is a great amount of silent stage business, as Krapp fumbles with the keys to his desk drawers, removes a reel of tape, opens another drawer, removes a banana and eats it. Krapp leaves the stage (as he will do several times) to drink; the audience hears a "loud pop of cork" to confirm that Krapp is consuming some sort of alcoholic beverage.

Krapp returns to his desk and consults his ledger, looking for the number of the tape that contains the recording made on his thirty-ninth birthday. He reviews his notes on the tape (as found in the ledger), loads the spools on his recorder and begins listening. The audience then learns about the thirty-nine-year-old Krapp: he was (as he is now) alone and he felt himself to be at "the crest of the wave" in terms of his talent as a writer. The voice on the tape also comments on *another* tape that the audience does not hear: this one made when Krapp was twenty-nine. At this young age, Krapp was living with a girl named Bianca a relationship that the middle-aged Krapp on the tape calls a "hopeless business." The thirty-nine-year-old Krapp mocks his younger self's resolutions to drink less and participate in a "less engrossing sexual life." The audience further learns that Krapp's father died when Krapp was twenty-nine. At this point, Krapp switches off the tape, leaves the stage, and "pops" three more corks from their bottles.

Krapp returns to his desk, singing and coughing. He turns on the tape recorder again and listens to his voice tell of the death of his mother. While Krapp's mother faced her death, Krapp sat outside her house and toyed with a dog and black rubber ball. The tape reports that his year "of profound gloom" continued, until the night Krapp "suddenly" saw "the whole thing," and had some kind of artistic "vision" at the end of a jetty. Because of this "vision," Krapp denied himself the love of an unnamed woman, to whom he said goodbye after a (presumably sexual) encounter in a boat. The older, listening Krapp becomes disgusted with the voice on the tape and switches it off. He leaves the stage for the last time to steel himself with more alcohol.

Krapp returns and is now ready to make his last tape. He begins his new recording with, "Just been listening to that stupid bastard I took myself for thirty years ago, hard to believe I was ever as bad as that." He reveals that his bowel troubles (first mentioned on the previous tape) still plague him and that he has only sold seventeen copies of his "opus magnum." His life has been reduced to that of a shut-in the only human contact

he experiences is that involving Fanny, an "old ghost of a whore." Despite his desire to remain aloof from his old memories, however, Krapp begins speaking of the previously-mentioned scene in the boat. He then removes the reel from the recorder, "throws it away," and replays the tape of him describing the woman in the boat, whose love he denied in order to produce what he thought would be his masterpiece. The play ends with Krapp listening to the end of that tape, staring into silence; the tape's last words, "Perhaps my best years are gone.... But I wouldn' t want them back. Not with the fire in me now," hang in the air as Krapp sits motionless, staring into space.

Part 1

Part 1 Summary

An old man named Krapp sits facing away from his desk. An old fashioned reel-to-reel tape recorder, microphone and boxes containing reels of recorded tapes sit on the desk.

Krapp sits motionless for a long moment, and then rises, fumbles in his pockets for a set of keys, searches through the desk and finds a banana. He peels it, throws the peel on the floor, puts one end of the banana in his mouth and doesn't move. He paces back and forth across the stage as he thoughtfully eats the banana. He almost slips on the peel but kicks it safely out of the way. Once he finishes the banana, he searches through the desk and finds a second banana. He peels it, puts the end in his mouth and remains still. Then he has an idea. He puts the banana in his pocket and hurries into the darkness. A cork pops. After a few moments, he returns with a ledger, sits and reviews it at the table.

Referring back and forth between the ledger and the boxes, Krapp goes through tapes with titles such as "mother at rest at last," "the dark nurse" and "memorable equinox" until he finds the one he's looking for, "farewell to love." He puts the tape on the tape recorder and listens closely as it plays.

Krapp hears his younger voice recounting the story of his thirty-ninth birthday on the tape. As he tries to get comfortable, he knocks one of the boxes of tapes off the table. Angry, he sweeps all the tapes and the ledger onto the floor, rewinds the tape and starts over.

Krapp-on-tape tells how he ate three bananas and could barely refrain from eating a fourth. He says a neighbor always sings at this hour and wonders if he ever sang. He tells how he is listening to random passages from another tape of another year, ten or twelve years ago. He mentions how he was living with a woman named Bianca at that point, and laughs at how young he sounded. Krapp-at-the-desk laughs as well. Krapp-on-tape talks about what the other Krapp-on-tape was talking about: statistics on how much he drank, plans for getting less involved with his sex life, laughing at his "youth" and a cry out to providence.

Krapp-at-the-desk switches off the tape and sits motionless for a moment He goes offstage. Another cork pops, and then another, and another. Krapp sings briefly in a raspy voice. He returns, wipes his mouth and listens again.

Part 1 Analysis

This short play, like other works by Samuel Beckett, leaves a great deal to the imagination. We are asked to answer a lot of questions and use our imagination to fill in the blanks. It's only when we have time to think about what we're watching that what

exactly we're watching becomes clear. We realize only through thinking about the play that Krapp is listening to himself talk about listening to himself. As the tape plays, we're listening to layers within layers of memory, and layers within layers of thoughts about memory. Old age is looking back on middle age looking back on youth.

The first symbol of the play is Krapp's name. Its spelling is different, but it sounds exactly the same as the well known slang word for excrement. The playwright might be suggesting that Krapp thinks that what he's listening to is crap, or that his life as a whole has been crap. In other words, the character isn't taking what he's listening to seriously. The playwright might also be suggesting that what we're listening to shouldn't be taken seriously. In other words, it may be that Beckett is calling his own play crap and we shouldn't take *any* of it seriously.

The other symbol in this section of the play is the banana, or more specifically, the banana *peel*. By throwing the peel on the floor and almost slipping on it, which is a classic piece of comedy, specifically in performances by clowns, the playwright is suggesting that Krapp himself is a clown. He again hints that we shouldn't take him or the play completely seriously.

Part 2

Part 2 Summary

Krapp-at-the-desk restarts the tape and almost immediately stops it again. Krapp-on-tape has used the word *viduity*, and Krapp-at-the-desk doesn't remember what it means. He pulls out a dictionary, discovers that it means being a widow or widower or the black feathers of the vidua bird. Krapp-at-the-desk switches back on the tape. Krapp-on-tape refers to a memory of a beautiful young woman who repeatedly caught his eye but threatened to call the police when he tried to speak to her. Krapp-at-the-desk shuts the tape off, thinks for a moment, and then restarts it.

Krapp-on-tape remembers playing with a dog and a small black rubber ball. He refers to the year just past as mostly gloomy, and then he remembers a night when he had a vision of the meaning of his life. He says he plans to talk about it now to preserve it for the day when all his work will be done and there's no room left in his memory for how everything began. Before Krapp-on-tape can go any further, Krapp-at-the-desk shuts off the tape and fast forwards.

Krapp-on-tape speaks about how the image of a lighthouse triggered an awareness of something he tried to keep hidden.

Krapp-at-the-desk fast forwards again.

Krapp-on-tape refers to a moment of intimacy with a woman and begins to end his recording.

Krapp-at-the-desk rewinds.

Krapp-on-tape speaks of the beginning of the intimacy with that woman. They had spent the afternoon strolling through the woods, and he asked her to open her eyes and "let him in" while they were lying in the sun. They came together physically, and there was nothing moving, but under them everything was moving.

Krapp-at-the-desk stops the tape. He fumbles through his pockets, pulls out the banana, and then puts it back. He goes into the darkness. We hear the sounds of a drink being prepared and drunk, and then Krapp returns. He searches through the first drawer, finds a fresh tape, puts it onto the machine and begins to talk.

Part 2 Analysis

The action of this section of the play suggests that Krapp-at-the-desk doesn't want to think about his younger self's ideas about the meaning of his life. This agrees with the symbolism of Krapp's name mentioned earlier. In Krapp's mind, his younger self's views on the meaning of life may be the biggest piece of crap in his life.

The part of the story that Krapp-at-the-desk listens to, the story of intimacy with the beautiful woman, suggests that Krapp-at-the-desk believes that intimate stillness with another human being is the meaning of life.

The emphasis placed on the word *viduity* suggests that Krapp himself may be a widower. In that case, the spouse he mourns might be the woman he's remembering.

Part 3

Part 3 Summary

Krapp begins his recording by referring to his younger self as a "stupid bastard" and thanks God that all the things his younger self was thinking about are over. Suddenly, he remembers the same woman. He stops talking, realizes he's recording silence and stops the machine. He starts talking, realizes he's not recording and restarts the machine. He describes his younger self's thoughts as something to take his mind off his homework and quietly wonders if he was right to do that. He thinks to himself and switches off the machine. He thinks some more, switches the machine back on and talks of how a year means nothing to him now.

Krapp speaks of little things that happened to him. He had enjoyed saying the word "spool," as in a spool of tape. His writing is becoming a little bit known. He went out once or twice before the summer went away. He refers to the park he visited in poetic terms, and then suddenly shouts to himself to rein in his last thoughts. He talks about reading a book called *Effie* and how it brought tears to his eyes. He remembers a woman called Fanny. He talks about going to church like he did when he was a boy, sings one of the songs from the service and talks about how he fell asleep while he was there.

Krapp speaks of wondering whether making one last effort might be worth it, but stops himself. He says he should just shut up, go to bed and lie there with happy memories of Christmas and bells on Sunday mornings. He should just "be again" and lie across her.

Suddenly, Krapp rips the tape off the machine, throws it away and puts on the older tape. He replays the passage he played before about his moments of intimacy with the woman. This time, he plays the tape through to the ending, in which Krapp-on-tape wonders thirty years ago whether the best years of his life are behind him. Krapp-on-tape says he wouldn't want them back now that he's got fire in him.

Krapp-at-the-desk stares into space as the tape plays on in silence.

Part 3 Analysis

Krapp's starting and stopping of the tape represents the starting and stopping of his memory. He's trying to fight down the memory that wants to resurface. He tries to talk about life now, but as he lists the things that have happened to him lately, he realizes the past has more meaning and returns to the previous tape. He gives in and returns to the past rather than face the present.

Among the things that happened to Krapp-at-the-desk in the past year, there are a couple of references to writing. The book that he refers to, *Effie*, may be a book that he wrote. This suggests that Krapp was a writer, and that the fire that Krapp-on-tape refers

to is a passion for writing. At the end, Krapp-on-tape wonders whether following his heart and devoting more attention to the woman would have made him happier. It is deeply ironic when Krapp-on-tape suggests that he wouldn't want those years back, given that Krapp-at-the-desk seems to want those years back desperately. In other words, Krapp-at-the-desk is in the state he's in because Krapp-on-tape made the wrong choice in life.

The theme of the play, then, is that second guessing life's choices leads to a life of regret, decay and emptiness. This is the kind of life Krapp-at-the-desk is experiencing.

The play is called *Krapp's Last Tape*. This suggests that this is the last tape Krapp is making before he dies. As he records it, he discovers that he is living the wrong life, or at the least that he regrets the choices he's made. His act of staring into space suggests that his emotional life is long over in contrast to his physical life, which is about to be over.

Characters

The title character of *Krapp's Last Tape* is a disheveled and sullen man who had dreams of being a writer and creating his "opus magnum," but who instead has spent his life as a solitary and bitter failure. His only companion is, ironically, his own voice, with which he interacts throughout the play through the use of the tape recorder. His isolation is of his own choosing, however, for he is misanthropic to the point of despising even himself, as his comments to the voice on the tape reveal. As his name suggests, everything about this man, his youth, his old age, his mind, his heart, his ideas of his own talents and impending greatness amount to little more than "crap." While the scatological joke of the title may strike some readers as juvenile or in poor taste, the name is indeed quite fitting, for it unmercifully points out exactly what Krapp's ambitions have brought him. The name also alludes to the fact that Krapp complains about his bowel troubles through the entire play and eats bananas in an attempt to prevent frequent movements. Thus, a man with such a name is incapable of one of the most simple and basic human bodily functions; such an ironic situation reveals the depth of what some readers regard as Beckett's pessimism and which all readers can recognize as the irony that pervades the play as a whole.

Themes

Alienation and Loneliness

As *Krapp's Last Tape* proceeds, the viewer understands that, during the course of his life, Krapp has systematically distanced himself from the companionship and love offered by other people. At twenty-nine, Krapp lived with a woman, Bianca, whose love he later called a "hopeless business" (despite the fact that she possessed very "warm eyes.") At thirty-nine, Krapp celebrated his birthday alone in a pub, "separating the grain" of what he felt were his great thoughts from the "husks" of his less important ones. That same year, his mother died and he told his new love that "it was hopeless and no good going on." Since then, Krapp has been completely alone, except for the occasional visit from Fanny, a "bony old ghost of a whore."

Thus, Krapp's isolation is self-inflicted; while this certainly marks him as pompous (since he felt that he could not bear to have his future career as a writer interfered with by women and love), it also evokes a degree of pity for the deluded old man. Krapp's only companion is his tape recorder; the cold and mechanical nature of a *recorded* voice (as opposed to a live one) reflects his essential isolation from human companionship and emotion. To further heighten the viewer's sense of Krapp's loneliness, Beckett has him listen eagerly to the tape (in a special "listening pose") that reveals Krapp's desperation to have anyone (even himself) engage him in conversation. (Of course, Krapp *acts* as if he has no need for the rest of humanity, but his hunching over the tape recorder belie his affected haughtiness.) What ultimately gives the play its power is that Krapp eventually sees how alien and alone he is and what a terrible mistake he made in forsaking human companionship.

Artists and Society

While some artists have become celebrities and spokespeople for their times (such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Arthur Miller, and Norman Mailer), others (such as J. D. Salinger and Thomas Pynchon) shun publicity and prefer to let their work speak for them. Regardless of an individual writer's feelings about publicity, however, all writers share a common goal: to have their work read by as many people as possible. Seen in this light, writers are social figures whose work brings their thoughts and ideas to the general public.

Krapp, however, is a writer whose work has reached no one and whose artistic "vision" is a total failure. The "magnum opus" that he devoted his life to creating has sold only seventeen copies and Beckett gives absolutely no indication that Krapp is a Melville-like figure whose work is too advanced or revolutionary to be appreciated in his own time. Instead, Beckett accentuates Krapp's failure as an artist through the play's setting (the austerity of which reflects Krapp's poverty), Krapp's costume (which resembles that of a clown), and his frequent "popping" of corks when he wanders offstage. Krapp's muse

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comes in a bottle, and the results of his "inspiration" are negligible. Despite the fact that Krapp remarks that eleven copies of his book are being sold to "circulating libraries beyond the seas" which will help him in "Getting known," the viewer understands that Beckett holds up Krapp as a man convinced of his artistic greatness but who is ignored by the very readers he needs to proliferate his ideas.

Memory and Reminiscence

Like Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* (1944) and Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1949), *Krapp's Last Tape* is a play that dramatizes the ways in which memories return to a character who finds these glimpses into his or her past more real and meaningful than the events of his or her present life. Krapp's present life (at the age of sixty-nine) is marked by its austerity and isolation, which he attempts to momentarily dispel through the playing of a tape he recorded thirty years ago. Krapp's tape recorder is, metaphorically, a mechanical brain; as Krapp toys with its controls, the viewer sees Beckett's imitation of the ways in which we all attempt to jump from moment to moment in the scenes which constitute our memories:

What I suddenly saw was this, that the belief I had been going on all my life, namely (*Krapp switches off impatiently, winds tape forward, switches on again*) great granite rocks the foam flying up in the light of the lighthouse and the wind-gauge spinning like a propeller, clear to me at last that the dark I have always struggled to keep under is in reality my most (*Krapp curses, switches off, winds tape forward, switches on again*) unshatterable association until my dissolution of storm and night with the light of the understanding and the fire (*Krapp curses louder, switches of, winds tape forward, switches on again*) my face in her breasts and my hand on her.

In the above passage, Krapp is attempting to stomp down the memory of his "vision" and instead dwell on the memory of his last real relationship with another person thus, all of the "winds tape forwards" are analogous to the ways in which all people manipulate the "tape recorders" inside their minds in order to select the "segments" they want to replay. When Krapp reaches the scene of himself and the unnamed woman in the boat, the audience learns that this memory is an important one, since as soon as it is over, Krapp *"switches off, winds tape back,"* and listens to it two more times during the course of the play. As the favorite memories of a man about to die become sweeter by their heightened value as remnants of a life that is about to end, so does the part of Krapp's tape describing his last meaningful encounter with another person become the gem of Krapp's memory. It is through this "mechanical memory" and his comparing the Krapp described on the thirty-year-old tape with his sixty-nine year-old self that Krapp ultimately learns what a terrible mistake he has made in saying "farewell to love."

Style

Setting

Krapp's Last Tape is set in Krapp's den a room that reflects, to a large degree, Krapp himself. It is bare, save for a small table; this lack of ornament emphasizes Krapp's emotional sterility and loneliness. As he is without any human interaction, his room is without anything that suggests comfort or humanity.

More telling than the barren stage are the lighting directions given by Beckett. The table and its immediate area are bathed in "strong white light"; the rest of the stage is in darkness. The question arises here of why Beckett would want any part of the stage to be dark i.e., why not simply have Krapp's room (even if it is to remain barren) take up the entire stage? The answer has to do with how Beckett uses lighting to mirror Krapp's attempt to fend off the figurative "darkness" that surrounds him. The voice of the thirty-nine-year-old Krapp reports (in the tape to which the older Krapp listens):

The new light above my table is a great improvement. With all this darkness round me I feel less alone. (*Pause*.) In a way. (*Pause*.) I love to get up and move about in it, then back here to ... (*hesitates*) ... me. (*Pause*.) Krapp.

Light and dark symbolism runs throughout the play, with light representing knowledge, life and love and darkness representing ignorance, death and isolation. Thus, Krapp attempts to remain in the "light" of what he sees as his own superiority and intellect but the darkness is always around him, almost mocking his desire to combat it. The thirty-nine-year-old Krapp reports that there was a "memorable equinox" during the past year; since the equinox is the date on which there is an equal amount of day and night, that year was one where Krapp's "light" and "dark" forces were balanced: his mother died, but he was still alive; he had a vision of his future career as an artist yet failed to sell any books; he had a lover but left her to pursue his career. *Now,* however, Krapp is thirty years older and is about to succumb to the "darkness" that surrounds him. This is accentuated in a number of ways (least of them being the play's title), such as his singing, "Now the day is over, / Night is drawing nigh-igh." By having Krapp's table where he will record his last attempt to "enlighten" himself about the meaning of his life surrounded by darkness, Beckett subtly hints at his hero's inevitable failure to combat the different forms of "darkness " that will eventually overtake him.

Costume

In the opening pages of the play, the reader learns that Krapp is dressed in "Rusty black narrow trousers too short for him," a "Rusty black sleeveless waistcoat," a "Grimy white shirt open at neck, no collar" and a "Surprising pair of dirty white boots, size ten at least, very narrow and pointed." This outfit, combined with Krapp's "White face," "Purple nose" and "Disordered gray hair" makes him appear very much like a clown. This image of

Krapp accords with what the audience eventually understands to be Krapp's earnest but foolish desire to make his mark as a writer and intellectual. Some clowns provoke laughter from their smiles and buffoonery, but others work by attempting to earnestly perform some serious task with absurd results. Krapp resembles this second type of clown, as he is thoroughly convinced of his own importance and seriousness but is always undercut by his absurd appearance. The fact that Krapp eats bananas and almost trips on one of their peels adds to the audience's perception of him as a man who, despite his attempts to prove otherwise, remains clownish.

Historical Context

The 1950s is often thought of as an era where artistic expression was as "square" and as indicative of the status-quo, as the era itself is sometimes portrayed on television and in contemporary films. The 1950s were, in fact, an era where major innovations in every form of art were noticed by viewers, readers, and listeners alike. With the death of George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950), the type of "well-made play" perfected by him (one which relied on conventional forms and structures) began to be replaced in some artists' minds with more experimental forms the most famous example of which remains Beckett's own *Waiting for Godot* (1952), which many viewers found exciting, different, and unlike any play they had ever before seen.

The forms frequently employed in other genres of literature experienced similar reexaminations and revisions. In 1950, Ezra Pound's "Seventy Cantos" were published, which are as unlike traditional verse as *Godot* is as unlike Shaw's *Pygmalion*. In 1953, Archibald MacLeish published his *Collected Poems,* the experimental nature of which struck many readers; MacLeish was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for the volume. Vladimir Nabokov's controversial novel *Lolita* was published in 1955 and was certainly one of the most daring novels ever written; its plot concerns a middle-aged professor's love for a twelve-year-old "nymphet." Two years later, Albert Camus (1913-1960), one of the leading philosophical novelists of the era, was awarded the Nobel Prize; although he sometimes refuted the label, he is often viewed as a proponent of existentialism, a radical philosophy concerning man's inability to find truth and meaning in himself or his world. That same year marked the premiere of *Endgame,* Beckett's second theatrical triumph; like Camus, Beckett was often described as an existentialist but expressed his disdain for any labeling of himself or his art. Other experimental works of literature from this time include Jack Kerouac' s novel *On the Road* (1957), published at the dawn of the "beatnik" movement, and Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party* (1958), which was lauded as one of the playwright's first major successes. Gunter Grass's *The Tin Drum* (1959), a novel told from the point-of-view of a three-year-old child who decides to stop growing, was praised as revolutionary in its examination of Germany during the Hitler era. An interesting close to the era can be found in Jean-Paul Sartre's *Critique de la dialectique* (1960), in which the controversial philosopher, playwright, and novelist expressed his political philosophies that were shaped, in part, by the rise of Soviet communism in the previous decade.

Other forms of art took similar wayward routes. The visual arts were enriched by the continued work of Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), whose painting "Massacre in Korea" reflected the turbulence caused when North Korean forces broke through the 38th parallel and recaptured Seoul, sparking the Korean War (1950-1953). Surrealism, which attempted to revamp old forms into more dreamlike ones, blossomed: Alberto Giacometti (1933-1970) unveiled his sculpture "Seven Figures and a Head" in 1950, Marc Chagall (1889-1985) unveiled his painting "The Red Roofs" in 1954, and Salvador Dali (1904-1989) revealed "The Lord's Supper" in 1955. Many experimental films were also made during this time: works such as *Rashomon* (1950), *La Strada* (1954), and *The Seventh Seal* (1956) forever altered conventional cinema. Architecture, too, saw

one of its most daring moments with the completion (in 1958) of Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum in New York City. Music also took new turns with bebop and "cool jazz" gaining momentum. While there were many fine works employing conventional structures and forms (such as 1953's *From Here to Eternity* and 1959's *The Miracle Worker*), the era was one where many artists Beckett among them grew dissatisfied with tradition and sought to break away from it in their own different ways.

Critical Overview

Like many of Beckett's plays, *Krapp's Last Tape* was both praised and disparaged when it was first shown to British and American audiences. Writing in the *New Republic,Robert* Brustein stated that the "haunting and harrowing" play was Beckett's best and that it offered its viewers "the perfect realization of Beckett's idea of human isolation." To Brustein, the play's greatness lay in Beckett's ability to "sound those chords of compassion which have always vibrated quietly in his other work"; his enthusiasm for the play can be seen in his lauding the "extraordinary economy of the writing" and the "absolute flawlessness of the form." Tom Driver, reviewing the play for the *Christian Century,* offered similar praise, bluntly describing it as "the best theatre now visible in New York."

However, not all critics responded so favorably. Kenneth Tynan, the former manager of England' s National Theater and one of the most powerful drama critics of the 1950s wrote a devastating review of the play. Written not as a traditional review, but as a parody of Beckett's style, Tynan mocked what he saw as Beckett's refusal to satisfy an audience's fundamental need for action and events in a play. The review's two "characters," Slamm and Seck, make comments like, "Nothing is always about to happen," and state that the play "would have had the same effect if half the words were other words." Tynan's review ends with Slamm asking, "Could you do as much?" and Seck replying, "Not as much. But as little."

While Tynan was alone in his abject dismissal of the play, other critics found it another example of an experiment that failed to fulfill the basic requirements for drama. Writing in the *Spectator,* Alan Brien called both *Krapp 's Last Tape* and *Endgame* "exercises in peevish despair." His explanation of what he disliked about Beckett's work is representative of the way many viewers felt that Beckett's *ideas,* while interesting, were expressed in a decidedly awkward and unpalatable way: "As the floodwaters rise he burns his bridges, scuttles his boats, punctures his water wings and tries to forget how to swim." (In other words, Beckett knows what constitutes "good theatre" but abandons these elements in an attempt to be different and "artistic.") Brien expands on this point by stating, "Art is illusion and Beckett seeks to destroy even that by creating deliberately inartistic works of art." Clearly, Brien (like many others during Beckett's career) had a different definition of "art" than the playwright.

Interestingly, the critical befuddlement that greeted the play was almost predicted by Alan Schnieder, the play's New York director:

First they say *Godot* was terrible, then when I do *Endgame* [which premiered in New York in 1958] they say, Well, *Godot* was not so bad but *Endgame* was awful. SoI direct *Krapp,* and the critics say *Godot* was really good terrific but what happened to *Endgame*? And *Krapp* was really lousy. As each new play comes along, the previous ones get better while the current one is awful. Critics can't seem to comment on what's before them without dragging in the other ones and rationalizing their previous reactions.

Throughout his career, Beckett was frequently "ahead of his audience," and *Krapp's Last Tape* is one of a number of works (with *Waiting fir Godot* as the most famous example) that have come to gain the critical respect it deserves only after its premiere.

Many contemporary critics prove this assertion with their open enthusiasm for the play. In his 1971 book, *All I Can Manage, More Than I Could,* Alec Reid describes what gives *Krapp's Last Tape* its power, concluding that the play is more than the enactment of a script:

It is not the words, the movements, the sights severally which produce the impact; it is the new experience, evoked through their combination on stage. This process involving eye, ear, intellect, emotion, all at once, we shall call total theatre.

In her 1978 biography *Samuel Beckett,* Deirdre Bair argues that *Krapp's Last Tape* "marks a new step in Beckett's writing" in which he is able to dramatize "an overwhelming sense of emotion." James Knowlson, in his 1996 biography *Damned to Fame*, calls the play "unusual in Beckett's theatrical opus for its tender lyricism and for a poignancy that borders on sentimentality." Finally, in his 1997 study, *Beckett: The Last Modernist,* Anthony Cronin contends that many of *Krapp's* original viewers turned away out of a "refusal to face the bleakness of Beckett's vision." Thus, Alan Schneider was correct in his idea of how Beckett's work takes time to be appreciated by critics.

Criticism

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Critical Essay #1

Daniel Moran is an educator specializing in literature and drama. In this essay, he examines the ways in which Beckett's play explores a man's turning away from humanity to pursue his dreams of artistic success.

In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), an autobiographical novel by Beckett's fellow Irishman James Joyce, the reader follows the artistic awakenings of Stephen Dedalus, who, as the novel progresses, becomes increasingly certain of what he sees as his destiny to become The Great Artist. Stephen is in constant rebellion against what he sees as the "nets" that attempt to ensnare artistic expression: Catholicism, nationalism, and creative conformity. Stephen's determination to "forge in the smithy" of his soul "the uncreated conscience" of his race, however, is constantly undercut by the very things he wishes to flee: despite his disdain for the church, for example, his first great moment of inspiration owes as much to the image of the Virgin Mary as it does to that of the peasant girl whose beauty strikes his aesthetic sensibilities. Later he admits to a friend that while he does not believe in God, he does not have the courage to disbelieve in Him, either. Eventually, he decides that he must employ "silence, exile and cunning" if he is to escape the nets of tradition and that he must fly above the snares of Ireland. The novel ends as he leaves his homeland for Paris, where he is convinced he will be able to answer his calling.

Like Stephen, the protagonist of Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape* was, at one time, certain that he had the makings of The Great Artist. Unlike Joyce, however, who ends his *Portrait* with the hero looking forward to his new career, Beckett begins his play with the would-be artist in his last days and informs the audience, in a number of ways, that Krapp's previous visions of grandeur were grounded more in his pompous ideas of self-importance than in any discernible vocation. As Stephen saw the need to flee from Ireland, Krapp felt a similar need to flee from his own humanity and reject the "light" of life and love. While Stephen's success as an artist is questionable (we later learn, in Joyce's *Ulysses* [1922], that he has returned to Ireland without any crowns of laurel), Krapp's failure is unmistakable: we watch him, on his sixty-ninth birthday, mechanically remember (through the playing of a tape) his former self and ultimately come to a numbing realization: he has wasted his life in pursuit of a false identity of The Great Artist that he forged in the smithy of his soul thirty years ago. As Stephen could not truly flee his home (and all its religious and political associations), Krapp learns in his last days that he was a fool to think he could have said, as he so proudly did at the age of thirty-nine, "farewell to love." His name, rather than his recorded aspirations, reveals his ultimate achievement.

While viewing the play, the audience actually meets *three* different (yet, in certain ways, similar) Krapps. The play begins with the sixty-nine-year-old Krapp on his birthday; when he listens to the tape he made of himself on his thirty-ninth birthday, we meet the "second" Krapp, who, in turn, comments on his recent replaying of the tape he made of himself at twenty-nine (the "third" Krapp). Thus, time in the play moves backwards and forwards at once, and it is through his moving back in time by listening to his past self

(commenting on *another* past self) while simultaneously moving into his increasingly desolate future that Krapp eventually comes to his moment of crisis. By comparing the three Krapps, the viewer (much like Krapp himself) eventually finds that the tapes reveal the life of a man who (by his own choice) became increasingly convinced of his own superiority over the natural desires of humanity. Unlike Joyce, who portrays the growth of his artist-hero's mind, Beckett invites the viewer to learn how his artist-hero has regressed into an absurd, clownish ghost.

To better understand how the play operates on a viewer, a brief "biography of Krapp" may clarify the reasons the older Krapps comment as they do on their younger counterparts. In his twenties, Krapp lived on Kedar Street with Bianca. He made "resolutions " to drink less and have a "less engrossing sexual life." His father died, his bowel troubles began and he sensed "shadows of the opus ... magnum": the masterpiece he imagined he would someday write. At thirty-nine, his mother died (after a "long viduity," i.e., widowhood) which Krapp learned from watching her window from a bench outside her house. Krapp felt no sorrow ("There I sat... wishing she were gone") and played with a dog while his mother lay dying. The rest of that year was one of "profound gloom and indigence" until a night in March, when Krapp "suddenly saw the whole thing" and had his great "vision" of his calling and of his destiny as The Great Artist. To facilitate what he saw as his impending greatness, Krapp broke off with his current love after their final sexual encounter in a boat. At sixty-nine, Krapp has seen no artistic success: his "opus magnum" has sold only seventeen copies (netting him "one pound six and something"). He is a myopic alcoholic who stumbles about the stage yet remains convinced that his decision to forsake love in the name of his "artistry" was the correct one that is, until the end of the play. As the play's title indicates, there will be no seventieth birthday for Krapp.

Once the events in Krapp's life are understood, the viewer can then begin asking questions about why Beckett uses this particular man's life to explore the issues of disillusionment and isolation. The first question that needs to be answered is why Beckett has Krapp make these tapes in the first place the answer has to do with Beckett's showing the audience Krapp's inflated sense of his own importance (which will vanish in the play's final moments). Through some arithmetic, the viewer can deduce that since there are five spools of tape in each box and nine boxes of tapes in Krapp's desk, there are forty-five tapes in all. Krapp is sixty-nine, so he began making his annual tapes at the age of twenty-four (69-45=24). Krapp makes a new tape on each of his birthdays at the exact time of his birth, demonstrating his idea that his life is worth recording. But since many people keep diaries and journals, Krapp's tapes may not strike the viewer as particularly pompous until one begins to examine the way he guards and orders them. The tapes are all neatly arranged with their contents briefly described in a ledger that Krapp keeps, along with the tapes themselves, *locked* in his desk. Consider the idea that anyone would want (or even care) about Krapp's tapes or that they need to be catalogued for the benefit of future generations the notion is absurd. Consider also the young James Boswell, author of *The Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791), who began keeping a journal at the age of twenty-two: he records in his *London Journal* his desire to have his diaries "carefully laid up among the archives" of his family and (in an even more Krappian moment) his conviction that "there is a blossom about me of

something more distinguished than the generality of mankind." Like Boswell, the youthful Krapp was convinced he would "blossom" into a figure whose life would be worth recording. Krapp uses tapes because he loves to hear the sound of his own voice (as Beckett's stage directions about the thirty-nine year-old voice suggest) and because the use of a machine (rather than pen and paper) suggests the mechanical nature of the elder Krapp. (Also note the irony of Krapp as a writer who does not actually *write* anything.) His recorder is an electric brain that he must use in lieu of actual memories, since he has become so distant from his own past and the emotional life he once possessed. Although he consults an envelope on which are scribbled his notes for this year's recording, his present ruminations are hollow and trivial.

The previously mentioned troubles with Krapp's bowels link the three Krapps together. At twenty-nine, Krapp was plagued by "unattainable laxation," at thirty-nine Krapp described himself as "sound as a bell, apart from my old weakness" and at his present sixty-nine, Krapp complains of the "sour cud and the iron stool." Krapp's lifelong constipation, however, is partly his own doing, since he constantly eats bananas an old home remedy for "stopping up" the bowels. The thirty-nine-year-old Krapp reports, "Have just eaten three bananas and only with difficulty refrained from a fourth. Fatal things for a man with my condition"; the older Krapp eats two bananas before he utters a single word. Besides their association with silent-movie clowns slipping on their peels (which Krapp almost does), Krapp's eating of so many bananas is symbolic of his desire to become *emotionally* constipated and "stop up" the natural flow and release of human longings and desires. Krapp sees his intellectual "visions" as much more important than the love (or even company) of other people, and has acted accordingly, rarely leaving his room except for a single visit to "vespers" where he fell asleep. To Krapp, The Great Artist cannot be sidetracked by love and must (like Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth), "stop up / The access and passage" of emotion to his heart.

"Stopping up," however, is not the same as "wiping out," and despite Krapp's efforts to flee his own humanity, his emotions eventually do emerge, painfully, like his "iron stool." When listening to his younger self, the thirty-nine-year-old Krapp mocks his previous romance with a girl named Bianca: "Well out of that, Jesus, yes! Hopeless business." Similarly, the sixty-nine-year-old Krapp mocks the thirty-nine-year-old's farewell to the girl in the boat: "Just been listening to that stupid bastard I took myself for thirty years ago, hard to think I was ever as bad as that. Thank God that's all done with anyway." These two Krapps' jeers at their former selves are "emotional bananas " means by which the Krapp looking back on his past attempts to "stop up" any regrets he may feel. But emotions, like bodily waste, will eventually come out, and Beckett suggests as much through the two Krapps' mentioning of the eyes of the women they forsook. After mocking his previous love for Bianca, the thirty-nine-year-old Krapp remarks (after a significant pause), "Nothing much about her, apart from a tribute to her eyes. Very warm. I saw them again. (Pause.) Incomparable! (Pause.) Ah well." (The regret in Krapp's "Ah well" (repeated at four different times in the play) gives the lie to his presumed haughtiness.) Similarly, the same Krapp, after telling his love "it was hopeless and no good" going on, "asked her to look" at him. Krapp may fool himself, but he cannot fool the viewer, who realizes that Beckett is offering us a glimpse of a man

whose emotional constipation is about to end; the "iron stool" of Krapp's epiphany will prove painful indeed.

Before advancing to this moment, however, one should also consider how Beckett uses light and dark symbolism to suggest Krapp's growing isolation and abandoning of his humanity. For example, as a youth, living with Bianca (whose name means "white" in Italian) on Kedar Street ("Kedar" is an anagram of "darke"), Krapp was able to fend off the "darkness" of isolation inherent in the world ("Kedar Street") with his emotional attachment to another person. While his mother was dying, Krapp sat outside gazing at a "dark young beauty" who was "all white and starch" and pushing a "big black hooded perambulator"; the chiaroscuro images here and mingling of death and birth in the "black perambulator," suggests the death of Krapp's worries over his mother and the possible birth of himself as an artist. The "little white dog" to whom Krapp tossed a "black, hard, solid rubber ball" suggests a similar combination of light (life) and darkness (death); also noteworthy is the fact that this year was one with a "memorable equinox" (the day on which there is an equal amount of day and night) at this point, Krapp was able to "balance" the light and dark forces in his life.

However, the most significant and complex pairing of light and darkness occurs when Krapp's thirty-nine-year-old voice tells of his moment of supreme inspiration that he had after his mother's death:

Spiritually a year of profound gloom and indigence until that memorable night in March, at the end of the jetty, in the howling wind, never to be forgotten, when suddenly I saw the whole thing. The vision, at last. This I fancy is what I have chiefly to record this evening, against the day when my work will be done and perhaps no place left in my memory, warm or cold, for the miracle that... (*hesitates*)... for the fire that set it alight. What I suddenly saw then was this, that the belief I had been going on all my life, namely (*Krapp switches off impatiently, winds tape forward, switches on again*) great granite rocks the foam flyingup in the light of the lighthouse and the wind-gauge spinning like a propeller, clear to me at last that the dark I have always struggled to keep under is in reality my most (*Krapp curses, switches off, winds tape forward, switches on again*) unshatterable association until my dissolution of storm and night with the light of the understanding and the fire

As previously mentioned, the world of *Krapp's Last Tape* is one of darkness: Krapp's vision occurred at night and is likened to a "fire" that sets his mind "alight," much as the "light of the lighthouse " offers a beacon of guidance to ships at sea. The essence of Krapp's vision here can be discerned by completing his broken off sentence: he became convinced that the "dark" he "always struggled to keep under" is, in reality, his "most " *precious ally*. Ironically, Krapp believed that his full artistic triumph would only be reached by *embracing,* rather than avoiding, the darkness of the world which explains why he then said "farewell to love" and began pursuing his dreams of being an artist. Only by confronting the essential isolation of his own existence would Krapp produce his "opus magnum." However, by embracing the darkness of the world, Krapp has produced nothing other than a small circle of intellectual light that surrounds his table; his embracing of darkness is like his constantly eating bananas: a means by which he

assumes an unnatural pose in regard to the natural "light" of the world. He cannot even bear to listen to his former self describe the "vision," since he has begun to realize that his past "enlightenment" was questionable and specious. Krapp now records his tapes at night and uses them to try to fend off the encroaching darkness of total isolation and death, but as his song suggests, "Now the day is over, / Night is drawing nigh-igh." Dressed in "dirty white boots," a "grimy white shirt," black trousers and a black waistcoat, Krapp's equinox is long past.

Thus, the action of the play *begins* with its hero about to succumb to the darkness of all that he once thought would bring him success. At sixty-nine, Krapp's mind possesses no "light" of the intellect: he does not remember the definitions of words he once used ("equinox," "viduity") and instead delights in the sounds of simple words like "spool." Like the "vidua-bird," Krapp, too, is alone, living through a long, sickly and alcoholic "viduity" in which he has been widowed from the rest of humanity. However, his final moments on stage are ones where he *does* become "enlightened" to what he has done with his time on earth. While recording this year's tape, Krapp's mind takes him back to a time when he was able to bathe in the light of humanity: he tells himself that, tonight, he will probably:

Lie propped up in the dark and wander. Be again in the dingle on a Christmas Eve, gathering holly, the red-berried. (*Pause*.) Be again on Croghan on a Sunday morning, in the haze, with the bitch, stop and listen to the bells. (*Pause*.) And so on. (*Pause*.) Be again, be again. (*Pause*.) All that old misery. (*Pause*.) Once wasn't enough for you. (*Pause*.) Lie down across her.

Krapp is at his moment of crisis: despite his attempts to mock his former selves and justify his decision to "embrace the darkness," he wishes he was alive again on a *morning* (instead of his present dark evening) and part of the human race that he once sought to avoid. Because of this realization, Krapp "suddenly bends over machine, switches off, wrenches off tape, throws it away, puts on the other, winds it forward to the passage he wants" and switches it on so he can hear again his description of his old lover's eyes. As Krapp listens, he makes no comments because his sarcasm is no match for the power of his epiphany:

I lay down across her with my face in her breasts and my hand on her. We lay there without moving. But, under us all moved, and moved us, gently, up and down, and from side to side.
Pause. Krapp's lips move. No sound.
Past midnight. Never knew such silence. The earth might be uninhabited.
Pause.
Here I end this reel. Box (*Pause*.) three, spool (*Pause*.) five. (*Pause*.) Perhaps my best years are gone. When there was a chance of happiness. But I wouldn't want them back. Not with the fire in me now. No, I wouldn't want them back.
Krapp sits motionless staring before him. The tape runs on in silence.

This, and not the "vision" he had at thirty-nine, is Krapp's true moment of enlightenment. The words about the earth being uninhabited apply to the present Krapp as well and the "fire" in him has cooled to an ember. His entire life has been an unwitting "opus magnum," the theme of which is that the intellect may be the superior part of man's nature, but to forsake other aspects of humanity in order to satisfy it can only result in painful isolation. Readers of Beckett may find such a touching moment odd in his oeuvre, but even a Samuel Beckett was wary of becoming a Krapp.

Source: Daniel Moran, for *Drama for Students,* Gale, 2000.

Critical Essay #2

Oberg examines the nature of self in Beckett's play, delineating the similarities between Krapp's Last Tape *and the works of Marcel Proust, a French author who greatly influenced the playwright*.

Krapp's Last Tape opens on one man alone with his own memories and desires, punctuating a monotonous present by recall of a moment-lit past. As a writer and as a man lying "propped up in the dark," Beckett makes Krapp's associations with Proust even more pointedly prominent. The situation of Krapp stocktaking and listening to old stocktakings is dependent upon the catalysts of Time, Habit, and Memory, the trinity considered by Beckett in his 1931 study of Proust. Considerations that Krapp has made and will continue to make of his life□intellectual, physical, spiritual□are rendered rememberable, if not memorable, with the aid of dictionary and tapes. Krapp now is not Krapp past nor Krapp future. Like Proust, Beckett explores the relation of the self, possessed of Memory and by Habit, within Time. What both writers explore is the mental mechanism by which that which is lost is found.

Krapp, by being able to summon and shut off mechanically his memories of things past, raises for an audience the question of whether *Krapp's Last Tape* is a parody of Proust. Certainly parody is involved. It is evident both in the general reduction of Krapp's memory process to mechanization and in the playing of particular segments of the tapes where life is seen as parodic. Also, by means of counterpointing and of juxtaposition with scenes that blatantly involve parody ("Bony old ghost of a whore"), moments that for Krapp were once memorable or incomparable are gently drawn into parody.

But if Krapp's spools of tape are meant to serve as parodies of Proust's vases, what has been neglected by critics is that Proust himself, as Beckett has pointed out, saw the parodic nature of certain memory processes, as well as of desire. Memory forms, transforms, and deforms. Joining Eliot in considering the pathos of men "mixing/Memory and desire," Beckett creates in *Krapp's Last Tape* a play that is not so much a Proustian exercise parodying Proust as an attempt to dramatize (and, hence, support) what is central in the Proustian vision.

In Beckett's study of Proust he follows through Proust's sharp distinction between the workings of voluntary and involuntary memory, associating the latter with those miraculous moments of breakthrough that emerge under the breakdown of space and time. What Beckett stressed was the mystic, religious character of those past moments that involuntary memory happens upon, moments of "revelation " and "annunciation." Akin to Joycean epiphanies, it is these moments of Proustian revelation that provide the structure of *Krapp's Last Tape*. As Krapp plays back past tapes, he passes from high moment to high moment. With Krapp in control of the switch, these moments resemble a cinematic fade-in, fade-out technique. The girl on the platform, the black ball, the jetty and punt scenes blend and form an extended showing forth of charged experience from Krapp's past. But the mechanization of the mechanism of memory□by making

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involuntary memory voluntary—commits Krapp to the destruction of moments that refuse reduction to human control:

But involuntary memory is an unruly magician and will not be importuned. It chooses its own time and place for the performance of its miracle. (*Proust* pp. 20—21) So that no amount of voluntary manipulation can reconstitute in its integrity an impression that the will has—so to speak—buckled into incoherence. But if, *by accident,* and given favourable circumstances (a relaxation of the subject's habit of thought and a reduction of the radius of his memory, a generally diminished tension of consciousness following upon a phase of extreme discouragement), if by some miracle of analogy the central impression of a past sensation recurs as an immediate stimulus which can be instinctively identified by the subject with the model of duplication (*whose integral purity has been retained because it has been forgotten*), then the total past sensation, not its echo nor its copy, but the sensation itself, annihilating every spacial and temporal restriction, comes in a rush to engulf the subject in all the beauty of its infallible proportion. (p. 54).

Beckett's apocalyptic language used to describe the Proustian miracle "annihilating," "rush," "engulf '—condemns Krapp in his attempts to mechanize, and thus destroy the very nature of, intense memories of lost things. Krapp's mistaken and pathetic taped past, instead of parodying Proust, relates to Proust's awareness of the dialectic of memory, in which voluntary and involuntary memory are seen as separate processes of the same mind. Beckett does not condemn voluntary memory, but rather indicates that voluntary and involuntary memory belong to different orders of experience. When, as in *Krapp's Last Tape,* voluntary memory is used, not for simple mnemonic recall, but to savor moments that refuse automatic summoning, Beckett parodies the misuse of the memory processes. Krapp's moments of visionary fire cannot be mechanically recalled without seeming perverse; for only through loss can that which was blinding, or beautiful, be found.

Beckett's understanding of the Proustian voluntary and involuntary memory allows him in *Krapp 's Last Tape* to present a dramatic study of the changing and changeless self: addicted to Habit, imprisoned by Time, frightened and attracted to the possibility of release through involuntary Memory. If Krapp's spools mistakenly seek by an act of will to render the presence of the Proustian moment, Beckett is concerned with more than the parody of involuntary memory. Above all, he is concerned with the pathos of an old man, torn by memory and desire. And, in the presentation of this old man, Beckett again looks back to Proust, joining Proust in an exploration of the nature of epiphany-like moments and of desire.

Constipated in sexual and artistic performance, creative activities which Beckett significantly correlates, Krapp can find a way out of a confined, repetitious past only by reference to those miraculous moments which his tapes conclude by ossifying instead of preserving. Putting aside for a moment the wrongness of Krapp's attempt to hold what cannot be held, we may consider the nature of those moments that Krapp alternately would repeat and "keep ... under." Associated with what only involuntary memory ought to find, the meshed moments on the jetty and in the punt provide the

point toward which all of the earlier flashes of memory (the girl on the platform, the black ball) proceed and from which the rest of the play gently, and then cuttingly, falls. The confusion of the jetty-punt scenes expresses Krapp's ambivalence toward such experience; he would both replay it and switch it off just short of its consummation.

The pain that Krapp feels in a remembrance of things past cannot be separated from the pleasure it yields. Like Pozzo in *Waiting for Godot*, Krapp finds unpleasantness and pain in the act of remembering happy days. The pain is due as much to elegiac nostalgia as it is to the intensity of experiences which both annihilate and create. Momentarily, that "suffering of being" which Beckett observed in Proust overwhelms Krapp:

Lie propped up in the dark—and wander. *Be* againin the dingle on a Christmas Eve, gathering holly, the red-berried. (*Pause*.) Be again on Croghan on a Sunday morning, in the haze, with the bitch, stop and listen to the bells. (*Pause*.) And so on. (*Pause*.) *Be* again, *be* again. (Pause.) All that old misery. (Speech italics mine)

The meshed jetty-punt scene establishes itself alongside other Beckett epiphany-like moments of clarity in his plays which were made possible under the regenerative workings of nature (water) and human nature (love)—the Lake Como reminiscence of Nell, Maddy's rehearsal of a honeymoon resort, Ada's recollection of a moment with Henry by the sea, Winnie's recall of "the sunshade you gave me ... that day ... (*pause*)... that day ... the lake ... the reeds." Winnie's moment is remarkably close to Krapp's playing of the punt scene, except that Winnie's is sanctified by drifting or floating up out of the blue. Although the result of involuntary memory, Winnie's moment shares with Krapp's moment a breakdown of syntax that signals a breakthrough of distinctions of subject and object, lover and beloved. Beckett records in both instances that rare Proustian moment of possession in which op-posites are reconciled; moving and motionless, brilliant and blinding, the Proustian miracle is rendered in images of motion (rhythm) and light (fire). Harmony and enlightenment thus are suggested as epitomizing such moments.

If Beckett considered in his monograph on Proust the impossibility of complete possession, his plays at times approach "those rare miracles of coincidence, when the calendar of facts runs parallel to the calendar of feelings." Where *Krapp's Last Tape* departs from Beckett's other dramatic works is in seeking to compress, into an edited whole, those moments or fragments which formed only an infinitesimally small part of Krapp's lifetime. As a result, there is the impression of grotesque distortion of the best (or worst) moments of Krapp's life. Although dependent upon expectation, life finally is not lived from intense moment to intense moment. And the disparity between the rhythm of life lived and life remembered becomes apparent in Krapp's desperate effort to isolate those moments of "congruence " and "realisation" which punctuated eternities of loneness and loneliness and tedium.

That charged moments are transient or absolute, and cannot be kept or rendered communicable in words, is presented in *Krapp's Last Tape* in conjunction with an exploration of the nature of desire, a concern particularly central to an old man

considering his younger years. In the jetty-punt scenes the Proustian miracle is specifically conceived in terms of the possibility of gratified desire leading to fulfillment (or extinction) of self. What began as a parody of the workings of involuntary memory expands into a philosophical-psychological statement that shows Beckett to be in a tradition more modern and ancient than that indicated by Proust or Bergson.

Beckett's involvement in *Krapp's Last Tape* in probing the nature of desire is very much at the human center of the play. As Beckett pursues the chances for a man's escape from sameness by means of transcendent moments, here closely connected with the momentary possession of desired object or person, he dramatizes both a particular Krapp and a generalized Everyman. What, Beckett asks, is the nature of desire? Through Krapp's playing back of old tapes, we discover not only that the Proustian moment cannot and will not be mechanized, but that the sheer nature of desire is parodic. Not only do memorable moments slip, words lose their meanings, and occasions shift context. More seriously, gaps are exposed in the fabric of desire that lend the kind of pathos to Krapp as desiring animal that Shakespeare drew from considering the human condition in his plays:

This is the monstruosity in love, lady, that the will is infinite, and the execution confined; that the desire is boundless, and the act a slave to limit (*Troilus and Cressida* III.ii.85-88).

Krapp's derisive laughter joins laughter on tapes that reveal Krapp, younger, when he was equally caught up in the disparities of desire and execution, ideal and real object.

Krapp, by being born, is committed to the mockeries of desire. He is like the *Act Without Word I* figure for whom the carafe is always beyond reach, except that Krapp's frustration is related less to the impossibility of attainment than to the nature of desire and to that metaphysical *post coitum triste* attendant upon awareness of the incongruities of ideal and real object. By having renounced the girl in the punt, Krapp is not spared her later transformation into "bony old ghost of a whore." Significantly, Krapp's very renunciation had suggested his fear of ever having to reconcile her with the idea or the ideal of the girl in his mind.

Krapp, then, dramatizes a situation which is inescapable as long as man desires. But his situation is complicated and intensified by his desiring in the face of depleted powers and by his attempting to keep what is not allowed. Love song and swan song, *Krapp's Last Tape* is Krapp's farewell to love and to life. But in waiting for the day to be over, which his song has soured and secularized, Krapp edits his life against the coming of night and compounds parody with pathos. Part voyeur, self-therapist, and old man, Krapp attends upon a world of diminished capacities and lost connections. Erections now are difficult for him, and keys and envelopes have been reduced to the function of locking up bananas and serving as space for jottings. There is no appointment for Krapp to keep except to wait for the night of which he so brokenly sings.

Frustrated and mocked by desire, Krapp's birthday becomes a celebration of his approaching death. Associating sex, sickness, and death, Beckett merges a

remembered child nurse with Krapp's mother's sick nurse, relates the punt scene to both sexual intercourse and death, and has Krapp pun on "crutch" as crutch and crotch. And the philological affinity of "viduity" and "vidua-bird" is used to point up an association of sex with death. Pathetic and parodic, life would not be equal to desire even if sickness and death could be eliminated.

If Beckett's consideration in *Krapp's Last Tape* of the nature of desire is both Proustian and more general than Proust, so does his dramatization of Krapp as desiring, old man remove him from indebtedness to specific antecedents. A large part of the power behind *Krapp's Last Tape* derives from its giving the impression of what it is like to grow old and yet to keep on desiring, to seek to break time's tedium by resort to an occasionally illuminated past. Krapp's situation joins him to Yeats' s aging man poems, to Eliot's "Gerontion," and to Frost's protagonist in "An Old Man's Winter Night."

Beginning as a Proustian work, *Krapp's Last Tape* evolves into a dramatization of an aging, desire-ridden man, into a play that leaves the job of positing antecedents or placing it in a contemporary context (the significance of pause, the undercutting of vision come to mind) farther and farther behind. Like any major literary piece, *Krapp's Last Tape* both has origins and is originless. Krapp's "P.M.s" come out of the oldest and most recent questionings of the nature of desire and of those intense moments which man is neither fated nor allowed to keep. *Post meridiem . Post-mortem. Krapp's Last Tape* expresses the parody and pathos of desire in an aging man for whom a decrease in erections is not accompanied by a decrease in desire.

Source: Arthur K. Oberg, *"Krapp's Last Tape* and the Proustian Vision," in *Modern Drama,* Vol. 9, no. 3, December, 1996, pp. 333-38

Critical Essay #3

Hewes reviews a production of Krapp's Last Tape, *finding the play to contain a "passion for life and a robust poetry" that the critic found lacking in Beckett's other plays, notably* Endgame and Waiting for Godot.

As a man who found *"Waitingfor Godot"* exasperating and *"Endgame"* stifling, it is a joy to report that Samuel Beckett's newest effort lets loose a passion for life and a robust poetry that were deplorably manacled in the aforementioned plays. Titled *"Krapp's Last Tape,"* this short character study begins unpromisingly as we watch a filthy old man rummaging about his disordered, dimly lit room. Too much time is taken for us to see the suggestion that man is an animal torn between primitive satisfactions (represented by a drawer in which Krapp keeps a supply of bananas) and intellectual ones (represented by a second drawer in which Krapp keeps his last spool of unrecorded tape). But from the moment Krapp puts away a banana he has started to eat and decides to listen to a particular tape in his vast collection of reminiscences recorded over a forty-year period (here we willingly allow Mr. Beckett the poetic license of pretending that tape recorders were in use many years before 1946, when they actually were put on the market), the play acquires energy and dramatic tension.

It is not a man revisiting his real past as Emily did in "Our Town," but a man revisiting his past as he recalled it in shorter retrospect. Moreover this man is not the depressed, half-alive specimen that squirmed on the microscope slide in Mr. Beckett's other plays. He is a man of extraordinary acuity, sensitivity, and vigor. And finally Krapp has an honesty that permits him to share his human weaknesses with the audience. At one point in the tape he is playing he hears his younger self launch into some romantic overstatement of life's meaning which makes him furious with himself, and he rushes to push the button that will allow him to skip that painful portion. On another occasion, as he is listening with more ease to the old tape, he belatedly hears himself use the word *viduity*. In disbelief he replays the sentence again, angrily stops the machine, rushes to get a dictionary and looks the word up. In this sequence, Mr. Beckett has not only been eminently theatrical, but he has also demonstrated for us the wonder and greatness of language, which most of us must use too pedestrianly.

A little later he skips too far along the tape and comes in at the end of what appears to be a juicy description of a love affair. As the tape moves on into a calmer philosophical postmortem, Krapp jumps with comic, understandable fervor to the rewind button. The description, when we do hear it, is richly poetic, and puts us all to shame for the relative poverty of our own experiences. We feel this poverty both in our depth of feeling and in our unwillingness to treat it with the importance and beauty it has to offer.

At the end of the play Krapp is left with his arms about the tape recorder, an old man clutching the heat of life with an appreciation that has grown proportionately with his diminished power to live it.

The performers are excellent. This applies to both the faithful tape recorder and to Donald Davis, who give us the old Krapp in character, and the young Krapp in a pre-recorded voice that sounds a little like Orson Welles. Director Alan Schneider and designer William Ritman have used the stage imaginatively. Behind the lighted foreground they have created a darkness into which Krapp can take mysterious excursions whose purpose is suggested only by the sound of a cork being pulled out of a bottle. The end result is a rich half-hour in which Mr. Beckett happily emerges as closer to Dylan Thomas than to the intellectual stunt man he has previously appeared.

Source: Henry Hewes, "It's Not All Bananas" in the *Saturday Review,* Vol. 43, no. 5, January 30, 1960, p. 28.

Adaptations

Krapp's Last Tape was adapted as a film and directed by Samuel Beckett. It is available from VideoFlicks at VideoFlicks.com.

Topics for Further Study

The American author Henry James's "The Beast in the Jungle" (1903) is a short story that examines the life of Marcher, a man very similar to Krapp. Compare and contrast the two protagonists' expectations of their futures and what these futures actually bring them.

In what ways is Krapp an "everyman" figure? Despite the experimental nature of the play, in what ways does it offer its audience a man who is like all men and who holds many of mankind's assumptions about the self, experience and time?

Many now-famous writers have had their diaries, journals, and letters published. Read a selection of these by a writer such as the Scottish biographer James Boswell (1740-1795) or the English poet John Keats (1795-1821) and compare their understanding and examinations of their personalities with Krapp's.

Waiting for Godot (1956) is Beckett's most widely-read play. Examine the ways that the play explores issues similar to ones found in *Krapp's Last Tape,* such as alienation, isolation, and the search for meaning in a disordered and chaotic world.

Compose an essay in which you imagine what Krapp does *after* the action of the play concludes. Despite the fact that the audience knows this is his "last" tape, will he live his remaining days any differently? Or will he sink into even deeper despair? Use what Beckett tells the viewer about Krapp in the play to support your ideas.

Compare and Contrast

1950: North Korean forces break through the 38th parallel and capture Seoul (the capital of South Korea). General Douglas MacArthur is appointed commander of UN forces in Korea. The Korean War will continue until 1953.

Today: North Korea remains a Communist nation, with Kim Jong Il (son of previous leader Kim Il Sung) as its President.

1953: Joseph Stalin dies; Nikita Khruschchev is appointed First Secretary of the General Committee of the Communist Party. Khruschchev became Chairman of Council of U.S.S.R. Ministers in 1958 and eventually took part in his famous showdown against President Kennedy (the Cuban Missile Crisis) in 1962.

Today: Since the collapse of the Soviet Union into a number of disparate nations, the Cold War(between the Soviets and Americans) has ended, with the United States as the assumed victor in this famous war of words and wills.

1958: *Krapp's Last Tape* premieres and is viewed by some as a triumph and others as a failure, in part because of the experimental nature of its form.

Today: Although the theaters of Broadway are almost wholly occupied with commercial fare, experimental theater is thriving in other places: plays such as Aviva Jane Carlin's *Jodie's Body (1999)*, in which a nude model discourses on politics, and Dare Clubb's *Oedipus (1999)*, a four-hour retelling of the myth largely from the point of view of Merope (his adopted mother), challenge contemporary audiences' ideas of theater as *Krapp's Last Tape* did over forty years ago.

What Do I Read Next?

Waiting for Godot, Beckett's 1952 play, is his most famous and widely-studied work. Its minimalist plot concerns two tramps who wait in an unnamed place for an appointment with Godot a mysterious figure who never appears but who always promises to arrive the following day.

Like *Krapp's Last Tape,* Beckett's 1957 play *Endgame* explores the effects of isolation and the human tendency to impose order on a completely chaotic world.

Beckett's trilogy of novels, *Molly, Malone Dies, and The Unnamable* (1959) are considered his greatest achievement in prose. The novels explore many of the themes found in *Krapp's Last Tape,* such as loneliness, isolation, and the creation of identity.

James Joyce's novel A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1916) follows the exploits and artistic awakening of Stephen Dedalus, Joyce's autobiographical counterpart. Like Krapp, Stephen is often convinced that he is destined to rise above what he sees as the ignorance of his contemporaries.

Vladimir Nabokov's 1965 novel *Despair* follows the sinister exploits of Hermann a Krapp-like character who views himself as superior to others and who (again like Krapp) is used by his creator to comment on the issue of artistic creation.

Perhaps the most famous American play of the twentieth century is Arthur Miller's 1949 drama *Death of a Salesman,* which treats the theme of memory and reminiscence in a way very similar to that found in *Krapp's Last Tape*.

Further Study

Graver, Lawrence and Raymond Federman, editors, *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979.

The entire volume is a collection of original reviews of Beckett's work; the section on *Krapp's Last Tape* features both a positive and negative review.

Knowlson, James. *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett*, Simon and Schuster, 1996.

Knowlson's exhaustive biography explores the ways in which Beckett's life in Ireland and France affected his work. Knowlson also treats Beckett's service to the French Resistance in great detail.

Knowlson, James, editor. *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett Volume III: Krapp's Last Tape*, Grove Press, 1992.

This volume features the entire text of Krapp's Last Tape as well as a facsimile of Beckett's notebook in which he kept his ideas (written in French) about how he wanted the play to be directed and performed.

O'Brien, Eoin. *The Beckett Country,* The Black Cat Press, 1986.

This is a large collection of photographs of the Irish locales that influenced Beckett's work; there are several images in the collection that surface in *Krapp's Last Tape*.

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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.

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□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:

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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.

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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.

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