The Memorandum Study Guide

The Memorandum by Václav Havel

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Introduction

The Memorandum (*Vyrozumeni*) is one of the best known and most popular plays by Czechoslovakia's (later the Czech Republic's) best known playwrights, Vaclav Havel. Inspired by the absurdities of life in Eastern Europe under Communism, Havel began writing the satirical play as early as 1960. Rewritten many times over the next few years, *The Memorandum* became the second of Havel's plays produced at Prague's Theatre of the Balustrade, where he was then literary manager. The play made its American debut in 1968 at the Shakespeare Festival's Public Theatre. This production of *The Memorandum* won an Obie Award for best foreign play. *The Memorandum* was first produced in London in 1977, and has been revived regularly around the world.

Like much of Havel's writing, *The Memorandum* is political, at least implicitly. The play concerns the tribulations of Josef Gross, the managing director of an organization encumbered by a bureaucracy that is out of control. The introduction of an artificial language, Ptydepe, is supposed to streamline office communications, but only makes it worse. Havel's satire is full of irony about the kind of jobs created by communism as well as the constant surveillance by office spies. Though Havel's vision was informed by his observations, many critics have noted that the office politics depicted can be found around the world. The importance of conformity to keep one's job is seen as relatively common. As Michael Billington of *The Guardian* wrote, "The play may have grown out of experience of Czech communism; its application, however, is universal."

Author Biography

Vaclav Havel was born in Prague, Czechoslovakia, on October 5, 1936, the son of Vaclav M. and Bozena (nee Vavreckova) Havel. His family was wealthy and well-connected in the arts and business. Havel's father was a restaurateur and real estate developer. In 1948, the Communists took over Czechoslovakia and the Havels' s property was taken away. Havel was denied a high school education. He got around this by working as a lab technician at a school for five years. This allowed him to attend night school, from which he graduated in 1954. Involved in Prague's literary scene, Havel was already writing, primarily poetry and essays.

After a two-year stint in the Czechoslovakian army, where he founded a theater company, Havel got a job as a stagehand at a theater in Prague, the Divadlo ABC (ABC Theater). The following year Havel took the same job at the Balustrade. His dedication led to bigger roles within the theater. He aspired to be a playwright, and helped others write plays. Havel got his first solo play produuced at Balustrade in 1963, *The Garden*. This was followed by *The Memorandum* in 1965. By 1968, he was the theater's resident playwright.

That year, a new repressive regime, headed by Gustav Husak, came into power in Czechoslovakia. Havel became a human rights activist. His activities lead to the banning of his works in 1969, a ban that lasted for the next twenty years. While continuing his political activities, Havel continued to write and work in theater, though plays dwindled in quantity and, and some would say, quality, by the mid-1970s. His financial situation was so dire that he had to work in a brewery to support himself and his wife Olga.

In the late 1970s, Havel was arrested and convicted several times for his human rights protests. In 1979, he was sentenced to hard labor. He served time until 1983, when pneumonia forced his release. Letters he wrote to his wife from jail were later compiled in a book *Letters to Olga* (1988).

After his release, Havel continued to protest. He was again arrested and jailed for nine months in 1989. That year, however, as a consequence of the so-called Velvet Revolution, the Czech communist regime collapsed. By the end of the year, Havel was elected president of Czechoslovakia. Though the adjustment to the presidency was difficult, Havel was internationally acclaimed and reelected president again the following year.

Considering his lack of political experience and the many difficulties he faced, Havel succeeded well as president. One significant problem for Havel was the rise of Slovak nationalism. (Czechs and Slovaks had been forced to share a country for many years.) The Slovak Republic was formally created in 1992, the same year Havel resigned his presidency. The following year, he was elected President of the Czech Republic. Despite a bout with lung cancer in 1995, in which half of one of his lungs was removed,

and some hints of political scandal, Havel remained in power at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Plot Summary

Scene I

The Memorandum opens in the office of Josef Gross, the managing director of an office. He is reading his mail when he comes across an important memorandum written in what seems like an incomprehensible language. His secretary, Hana, informs him that it is written in Ptydepe, a new language that is supposed to be more efficient for communication. Gross learns that his deputy director, Jan Ballas, has ordered its introduction without his knowledge. Gross asks him to cancel its introduction, and while Ballas agrees at first, he later convinces Gross that the use of Ptydepe would be best for everyone. This is endemic of the growing power struggle between Gross and Ballas. While Gross wants to work on a humanist principle, Ballas is ready for a conflict and believes he has everyone in the organization on his side.

Scene II

In the classroom where Ptydepe is being taught, the teacher, Lear, explains the background of the language to four clerks/students. The language is supposed to be more reliable because it is more redundant.

Scene III

Gross takes the memo to the Ptydepe Translation center. He meets with Otto Stroll, the head of the section, in hopes someone will translate the memo. Stroll tells him that he needs authorization, and that those who work in the center are not experts in the language. Gross must get authorization from Alex Savant, the Graduate Ptydepist. Stroll and Savant go to lunch, while Gross waits, talking to others including the secretary, Maria. When they return, Savant tells Gross he cannot give him the authorization. He must get it from Helena, the chairman.

A birthday party is going on next door, to which all but Gross go to. He is left alone with classified materials, though Helena tells him that he will be watched by the staff watcher, George. George watches everything in these offices through cracks in the wall. When Maria returns, Gross asks her to translate the memo for him. She will notrisk her job. Gross is verbally abused by George when he asks for a cigarette, and returns to his office.

Scene IV

In Gross's office, Ballas, accompanied by his ever present but always silent associate Ferdinand Pillar, awaits. Gross still insists that Ptydepe be eliminated from the workplace. Ballas tries to blackmail him into submission on this point. Gross finally

agrees to sign an order allowing the introduction of the language. Ballas then insists that he become the managing director, and Gross the deputy. Gross sees the logic in this move and steps down.

Scene V

In the Ptydepe classroom, Lear continues to lecture on the background of the language. Gross interrupts, asking him to translate the memo. Lear agrees, but only if Gross shows genuine interest in the class. Lear drills the students on specifics of the language. Gross gets frustrated and leaves.

Scene VI

Gross returns to the Translation center, where most of the employees are still at the birthday party. As the employees start to return, Gross tries to get Helena to give him authorization to get the memo translated. Helena will give it to him, but only if he has not yet received a memo in Ptydepe. Gross asks her to translate the memo, but she will not. Gross becomes frustrated as it proves impossible to get the memorandum translated according to the paradoxical rules set out. Gross's outburst is heard by Ballas and Pillar, who have snuck in behind him. Ballas fires Gross, and hires George, the staff watcher, as his new deputy. Gross is to report the next day to tidy up the details of his firing.

Scene VII

The next day, Ballas and Pillar come to work. Ballas chides Pillar for not learning Ptydepe. When Hana appears, Ballas is appalled to learn she has stopped taking Ptydepe classes because they were too hard. Even Ballas has stopped taking the classes, though he claims it is because of the demands of work. It seems only Lear and those who work in the Translation center know the language. Ballas is also annoyed that Pillar keeps leaving with members of the Translation center staff. When Gross enters for a third time, Ballas offers him the position of staff watcher. Gross takes it. Hana reports that everyone, except Ballas, is unhappy with Ptydepe. Ballas does not like this news.

Scene VIII

In the Ptydepe classroom, Lear is now teaching only one student, Thumb. He explains interjections to Thumb. Lear is disappointed by Thumb's progress in learning the language. Lear throws Thumb out of class for holding up the other students.

Scene IX

In the Translation center, Maria reports for work. Gross scares her when he compliments her clothes through the chink in the wall used by the staff watcher. Maria tells him that she had found a job for him in the theater. After she leaves, Ballas appears and questions Gross on what he has observed, especially about the staffs reception to Ptydepe. Ballas asks those who work in the translation center about their work. The translation work is slow and Ptydepe is taking on emotional overtones, which is not supposed to happen. Ballas asks Helena if the language is not doing what it should, and she confirms that is so.

Ballas gives Gross the Deputy Directorship again, and demotes George back to staff watcher. Ballas wants Gross to help him get to where they were originally: enthusiastic about the use of the language. After Gross leaves, Ballas further questions the staff of the Translation center. He learns about the paradoxical situation concerning authorizations of translation of documents. Helena, Stroll, and Savant accuse him of thinking up this vicious circle of bureaucracy. Ballas gives orders that should clarify the situation, and has them translated into a document for him. It is a protest that makes him look bad, making Ballas even more angry. He leaves.

Gross appears in the office again, startling Maria. Gross is self-critical about his previous actions. His insight moves Maria, and she offers to translate his memo for him. It praises him for being a good managing director and humane decision maker. It also agrees that Ptydepe is not good for the organization. After Gross leaves, George informs Maria that he heard the whole exchange.

Scene X

Gross returns to the managing director's office, and reclaims his job. He tells Ballas that his tenure is over and that Ptydepe will have to be removed. Ballas agrees with him and graciously steps aside. While Gross intended that Ballas be fired, Ballas blackmails him so that he can remain deputy director. Gross wants them both to resign, but realizing the futility of such a move, allows Ballas to have his way. The translation center staff appears, demanding to know who insisted they work with Ptydepe. When it becomes obvious that Ballas is accusing Pillar, he finally speaks and declares his support for natural speech before exiting. A man, Column, appears at the back door, and quickly replaces Pillar.

Scene XI

In the Ptydepe classroom, Lear is lecturing to his four original students on the problems with Ptydepe. He reveals that the office will use a new artificial language: Chorukor. It is based on similarity of words.

Scene XII

In the translation center, most of the staff is at another party. Gross bursts in, angry that another artificial language will be used. Ballas criticizes him for not being with the program. After Ballas leaves, Maria tells Gross that she is upset because George overheard her translating the memorandum. She was fired by Ballas, and asks Gross to overturn his decision. Gross declines, telling her to work with the theater in the job she found for him. Maria is invigorated by his words, and leaves.

Act 1, Scene 1

Act 1, Scene 1 Summary

This Czechoslovakian play tells the satirical story of a government bureaucrat struggling to preserve his professional and personal identity in the face of aggressive attempts to discredit him and undermine his authority. On a metaphoric level, the play functions as an indictment of communist/socialist thought and political governance.

Gross arrives in his office and begins his day's work. As he sorts his mail, one letter in particular gets his attention. He reads it aloud, a memorandum in a nonsense language, the meaning of which can't be understood either by the audience or by Gross. As he reads, Ballas and Pillar come in and watch, unnoticed. When he's finished, Gross realizes they're there and asks what they want. Referring all the time to the silent Pillar for confirmation of his every statement, Ballas asks where the incoming mail should be logged. The current log book is full, and there are no funds left in the budget to buy a new one. Gross gives him cash out of his own pocket. Ballas and Pillar thank him and leave.

Hana comes in, greets Gross, sits at her desk and starts combing her hair. She does this throughout the play, instead of actually working. Gross asks her about the memo, and she explains that it's written in Ptydepe, a new language being introduced into the office. As they discuss how Gross, even though he's Managing Director, knows nothing about it, Hana asks repeatedly whether she can go out and get the milk. Gross finally says she can. She goes out, and Ballas and Pillar come in. They explain they've bought a new log book, but the Department of Authentication refuses to authenticate it, saying the expense wasn't officially authorized. Gross says that he can personally authorize it, but he refuses to put the authorization in writing.

As Ballas and Pillar turn to go, Gross asks them about the introduction of Ptydepe, saying that because he didn't authorize it, the only other person who could have done so is Ballas, his deputy. After saying he can't be expected to remember everything he authorizes, Ballas admits he did authorize it and explains that Ptydepe is being introduced to facilitate accuracy in inter-office communication. Gross says he's unhappy about the whole situation as Hana returns with milk, sits and combs her hair. Ballas says he'll cancel the order to use Ptydepe and have all the Ptydepe documents already prepared translated back into natural language.

After Ballas and Pillar go, Gross mentions how strange their relationship seems and how unlikely it is that anyone would want to learn and use Ptydepe. Hana tells him that special Ptydepe classes have been set up throughout the Department and that everyone has signed up except Gross. Ballas ordered mandatory participation, and a Ptydepe translation center has been set up. As she asks repeatedly whether she can go out and get the rolls, she explains that the Translation Center has been set up in what

used to be the Accounts Department, also on Ballas' orders. Gross tells her she can get the rolls, and she goes out.

Ballas and Pillar come back in, with Ballas saying that the authorization for the log book has to be in writing after all because it will streamline the clerical work. He adds that it would also be good tactics, explaining that there are rumors Gross has been using an official rubber stamp inappropriately. Providing the authorization in writing will prevent an investigation. Gross produces a prepared letter. Ballas takes it and is about to leave, but then Gross asks whether he's canceled the use of Ptydepe. Ballas says he hasn't because he doesn't want to anger the higher-ups from whom the idea for Ptydepe originally came.

Gross complains about the way Ballas has repeatedly issued orders without consulting him. Ballas explains that while he agrees with Gross about Ptydepe, he sees advantages to going along with the directive, mentioning the possibility of the higher-ups giving permission for the construction of a new snack bar, as long as they're happy about the use of Ptydepe. He also says the staff supports the use of Ptydepe. Gross says that as managing director it's up to him to decide what's good for the staff. Ballas says he has to bow to the will of the masses, and Gross says he won't be dictated to by a mob, protesting that forbidding people to use their natural language reduces their humanity.

Hana returns with rolls, sits and combs her hair. Ballas comments to Pillar that Gross isn't prepared to be reasonable and tells him he has an hour to change his mind. Ballas and Pillar go out, and Gross asks Hana what she knows about how Ptydepe is being used. She tells him it's being used for official memoranda, and the one Gross has just received refers to the findings of the latest departmental audits. When Gross asks where the Translation Center is, she tells him. He takes his memorandum and goes out, saying he's going to lunch. Hana says he's going to enjoy it; it's goose.

Act 1, Scene 1 Analysis

As mentioned in the introduction, this play is a satire, a style of comedy in which a thought, belief system or characteristic, of either an individual or a group, is exaggerated in order to point out how ridiculous it is. The target of the satire in *The Memorandum* is government bureaucracy or red tape - the rules and regulations that have to be followed in order for government to function. There are two specific aspects to bureaucracy that are the particular satirical focus of the play, the constant struggle for power and influence and the appearance of regulations that seem to exist solely for their own sake, rather than for the purpose of creating any real benefit. The former is illustrated by the way Gross and Ballas argue, albeit politely, over who has the right to make decisions within their department. Their conflict intensifies throughout the play, with the shifting of power between them simultaneously providing key plot elements as well as further defining the satire.

Meanwhile, the fact that the purpose of their department is never actually defined takes the satire one step further, suggesting that such bureaucratic complication isn't limited to one area of government but in fact exists throughout the administration and perhaps all administrations. In other words, the play is satirizing bureaucracy in general, not just that in Czechoslovakia.

The second point of focus, the introduction of superfluous regulations, is illustrated by the introduction of Ptydepe, an extreme example of the kind of seemingly pointless change to operations that bureaucrats, not only in the play but in the real world, seem to make just because they can. How extreme and ridiculous Ptydepe actually is will be defined throughout the play in a series of scenes in which we see how it actually works - or doesn't, as the case may be. Meanwhile, Gross' questioning of the validity of both Ptydepe and its use combines with his reference to humanity to illustrate the play's primary function and theme, which has less to do with satirizing bureaucracy than with illustrating the dangers of living under a socialist communist system of government. In other words, the satire is intended as a call for individual freedom in the face of state oppression and control, such as existed in Czechoslovakia at the time the play was written.

This oppression is symbolized throughout the play by several elements, including the presence of a Staff Watcher and the nature and purpose of the character of Pillar, who is, as the audience learns later, a representative of the system. The development of this theme parallels the increasingly extreme complications of the satirical Ptydepe plot, illustrating the way that as bureaucracy and government control increases, the need for individuals to stand up for their human identity also increases.

An illustration of government control appears in the way Hana, and later in the play Maria, go shopping for one item at a time. Under the communist governments in Czechoslovakia and the rest of Eastern Europe at the time the play was written, access to just about every commodity, including food, was limited and tightly controlled. Hana and Maria's expeditions therefore define the real-life backdrop against which absurdities like Ptydepe actually seem almost normal.

Other elements of satire in this scene include Hana's constant combing of her hair, which illustrates that in spite of the apparently omnipresent control of the State, there are still lazy and undisciplined workers. The argument could be made that Hana, again like Maria, represents the kind of individualism so strongly proclaimed by Gross, that people should be free to comb their hair and be lazy if they want.

Elements of foreshadowing in this scene include the references to the authorization of the log book and to the rubber stamp. Aside from being secondary illustrations of the play's satiric point about the foolishness of bureaucracy, they also foreshadow developments in the power struggle between Ballas and Gross.

Act 1, Scene 2

Act 1, Scene 2 Summary

This scene takes place in the Ptydepe classroom. Lear instructs four clerks on the origins of Ptydepe, explaining in great detail how it was developed to reduce individuality and the potential for misunderstanding in inter-office communications. As Gross passes through the classroom, memorandum in hand, Lear talks at length about how Ptydepe might seem complicated at first, but he says that with deep and unshakeable faith, it can be learned. A clerk named Thumb asks what Lear clearly sees as smart questions, and at the end of the scene, he is given an "A."

Act 1, Scene 2 Analysis

This relatively brief scene again illustrates the foolishness of Ptydepe in general and the introduction of similar regulations. The scene shows how bureaucrats create plausible, if complicated, explanations to justify things that seem clearly to be foolish, pointless, self-indulgent or just plain wrong. In modern terms, this scene portrays "spin," a way of interpreting events or circumstances, no matter how negative, in a positive way designed to achieve a particular goal.

The character of Thumb satirizes the blind faith of individuals in bureaucratic systems who go along eagerly with whatever nonsense is proposed in order to preserve, and perhaps improve, their own position. In other words, he's all about sucking up. On the level of the play's central metaphor, however, warning against the dangers of a socialist communist system, Thumb is a warning against unquestioning belief in that system. He is, to coin a phrase, an example of what happens when someone falls under the system's "thumb," or control.

The character of Lear is perhaps given that name in reference to the character of King Lear in Shakespeare's play of the same name, an elderly monarch suffering from delusions. If this is in fact the case, the reference suggests that Lear in this play is himself deluded, meaning that he has been sucked into the system in much the same way as Thumb would clearly like to be.

Act 1, Scene 3

Act 1, Scene 3 Summary

The setting is the Ptydepe Translation Center. Gross comes in to get his memorandum translated. Stroll introduces himself as the head of the Center, explaining in terms that refer to a new baby that the operations of the Center are still in their infancy. As they talk about the process of how a document gets translated, Stroll lights a cigarette and smokes while Gross looks for his own cigarettes and can't find any. The easily distracted Stroll also talks with Savant, who's passing through, about there being goose for lunch in the canteen, and then after Savant is gone, he talks with Gross about why an authorization for translation is necessary in order to prevent individuality from creeping into Ptydepe. Suddenly Stroll excuses himself and runs out.

As Gross again searches his pockets for cigarettes, Helena comes in, looking for someone whose name Gross doesn't recognize. When he introduces himself as the Managing Director, Helena asks whether there's anything he can do about the snack bar and then introduces herself as the Chairman, but she is unable to say of what. She goes out, and Gross again searches his pockets. Gross waits, and then Stroll returns, doing up his trousers, indicating that he has just visited the restroom. He and Gross return to their conversation about Ptydepe translation, with Stroll explaining that each department is assigned someone responsible for ensuring Ptydepe is used correctly - the Ptydepeist.

Maria comes in, carrying a bag of onions. As Stroll talks about the duties of the Ptydepeist, Maria greets Gross and goes out. The audience hears her offer Helena the onions. We hear Helena tell her to file them, and a moment later Maria comes back in and sits at her desk. Gross clarifies with Stroll that a translation has to be authorized by a Ptydepeist, and then Savant comes in, ready to go with Stroll to lunch. Stroll introduces Savant as the departmental Ptydepeist, and Gross tries to speak with him. Savant insists that it's time for him and Stroll to get their lunch, however. After they've gone, Gross asks Maria for a cigarette, but she explains that she doesn't smoke. Gross asks whether he can have one of the cigars on Stroll's desk, but Maria explains that Stroll would get very angry.

Gross settles down to wait. Helena comes in and covers his eyes, playfully asking who he thinks she is. He makes several wrong guesses, and then she takes away her hands. She realizes he's not who she thought he was and reacts angrily when he doesn't find her mistake amusing. As she goes out, Gross again asks Maria whether she's got any cigarettes, again searches his pockets and again settles down to wait. After a while, he begins to take a cigar, but he stops when he sees Maria watching him. He protests that taking one wouldn't do Stroll any harm.

Stroll and Savant come in, talking happily about how much they enjoyed their lunch. Gross tries to get their attention as they talk about whether another colleague will be

having his. The audience understands them to mean that they'd like his share. They send Maria out to ask, and when she's gone, they comment on how sexy she is. Gross finally gets them to talk to him, and as they light cigarettes, he asks whether he can get a translation. He also asks if he can buy a cigarette. Stroll says he's only got three. Savant explains why he can't provide authorizations to whoever asks and then talks in Ptydepe with Stroll about those regulations. Gross tries to get them to include him in their conversation, but their efforts are only half-hearted. Maria returns with the news that the colleague will be having his lunch after all, and Stroll and Savant are disappointed. Gross tries to get them to define the circumstances under which he can get an authorization for translation.

Helena comes in with an announcement that a staff member is having a birthday party in the office next door and tells Maria to go out and get some limes. As Savant and Stroll leave for the party, Gross demands to know where he can get authorization. They tell him he can get it from Helena and go out. When he starts to ask her for his authorization, she tells him he'll have to wait. She adds that it's all right for him to be left alone in the office with all her sensitive documents because the Staff Watcher is observing him through a hole in the wall. After she goes out, Gross looks around for the hole, but George (the Staff Watcher) tells him it can't be found. Gross sits, waits, searches his pockets, sits and waits. Then Maria returns to collect her purse. Gross asks whether she can do a translation for him, but she says she's not authorized. He tries to talk her into it, asking her name and calling her "sweetheart." When she mentions being reported by the Staff Watcher, he says that she can whisper the translation in his ear. Maria says that she has to get the limes and runs out. When she's gone, Gross goes to the cigar box and prepares to steal one. He speaks to George, and when George doesn't respond, he opens the lid to the cigar box. George suddenly speaks to him. Gross accuses George of not knowing that he's the Managing Director, and George speaks in Ptydepe. Gross runs out, saying he expects an apology. George speaks one last angry word in Ptydepe.

Act 1, Scene 3 Analysis

At the core of this scene is Gross being, in contemporary language, kept out of the loop. This is demonstrated in several ways, some more overt and others more symbolic. The overt ways include when Stroll goes to the washroom in the middle of his conversation with Gross and when both Stroll and Savant repeatedly let their attention be distracted by lunch. Both actions illustrate the small regard they give Gross and his concerns. Other overt demonstrations of their attitude can be found in the way they talk in Ptydepe, excluding Gross completely, and the way that the regulations surrounding the translation of Ptydepe seem deliberately designed to keep Gross uninformed. All this is another manifestation of the play's satirical focus on power games within bureaucracy, pushing Gross along on the journey towards complete bureaucratic powerlessness that he's being forced to take.

On a more symbolic level, Helena's little game represents the way Gross is blinded, or being kept in the dark. Also, names in this scene are symbolically important, in that

"Savant" is a term for an individual of unusually high intelligence and "Stroll" is a term that implies casualness and relaxedness. The use of these terms as names indicates the ways in which Gross is trapped, on the one hand by the cleverness around him and on the other hand by the offhand way others view his situation. "Maria" is perhaps also significant, in that her name is a version of Mary, the name of the Blessed Virgin, an eternal symbol of hope. This idea is supported by what happens to Maria at the end of the play. She breaks free of the bureaucracy that surrounds both her and Gross, providing hope that individuals trapped by the socialist system, as represented by that bureaucracy, will themselves one day be free.

Finally, Gross' fruitless search for cigarettes represents his equally fruitless search for an explanation of how Ptydepe and the regulations surrounding its use actually function. Stroll refusing him a cigarette and Maria telling him Stroll would be angry if his cigars were stolen represent that Stroll has knowledge, and therefore power, that Gross is desperate to obtain and that Stroll is reluctant to give. Gross' desperation peaks in his attempts to steal both a cigar and a translation, which are both denied - one by the Staff Watcher, who is a symbol of the watchfulness of Communist governmental control, and the other by Maria, who is a symbol of how individuals act, or react, out of fear of that control. In other words, this scene dramatizes how humanity, as symbolized by Gross, is both limited and oppressed by the manipulations of those who wish to control and even squelch individuality, independence of thought and critical thinking.

Act 1, Scene 4

Act 1, Scene 4 Summary

Back in Gross' office, Ballas and Pillar are waiting, and Hana is combing her hair as Gross comes back in. Ballas asks whether he's prepared to be more reasonable, as Hana asks repeatedly whether she can go and get the chocolates. Gross and Ballas argue about whether an order can be issued to stop the advance of Ptydepe. Ballas tells Hana that she can go, and then once she's gone, Ballas tells Gross that the higher-ups are in control of what happens to Ptydepe. He says he has no choice but to sign the order authorizing its continued use. Gross says he won't compromise his principles, but Ballas tells him that's exactly what he will do. He threatens to use the written authorization for the purchase of the logbook as proof that Gross abuses his authority, which would cause Gross to lose his job.

Gross says he can always tell the higher-ups that Ballas manipulated him into signing that authorization by threatening to tell the higher-ups about the rubber stamp, but Ballas explains at length that the authorization proves he was aware he'd used the stamp inappropriately. Gross offers to resign. Ballas insists that Gross sign the authorization for the continued use of Ptydepe, and Gross asks why. Ballas says his reasons are his own business. Gross asks whether Ballas really thinks Ptydepe will streamline the function of the office, and Ballas speaks at length about why that is exactly the case. He says that the preciseness and lack of emotional content in Ptydepe will prevent any misunderstandings and any feelings from being hurt, meaning that its use is far more humanist in intent than current language.

Hana comes in with chocolates, sits and combs her hair. Gross says he's convinced. Ballas hands him the authorization for the continued use of Ptydepe, and Gross signs. He then admits he'll need some help adjusting to the new system. Ballas suggests that because he knows more about Ptydepe, he should become Managing Director, and Gross should become his deputy. After a brief protest by Gross, Ballas insists they change desks and goes out with Pillar to collect his things. Gross comments to himself that he really had no choice, saying that if he hadn't agreed his career would have been over. As Deputy Director, he can still have some influence. Hana asks repeatedly whether she can go for her lunch, and finally Gross says she can. After she's gone, Gross takes the fire extinguisher off his wall. He is holding it in his arms as Ballas and Pillar come back in, carrying their own fire extinguishers and other desktop items. Gross asks himself why he can't be a little boy again, saying that he'd do everything differently. He goes out, and Ballas makes himself comfortable at Gross' desk.

Act 1, Scene 4 Analysis

On the level of plot, this scene shows how the manipulations of bureaucracy, of people interested in power for its own sake, are closing in around Gross. They are essentially

getting him out of the way of what the higher-ups, and Ballas, see as progress. These manipulations also function on a thematic level, showing how the good will and intentions of humanists like Gross can be manipulated by the "spin" placed upon their plans by those interested in controlling them, that is, those in power, or the communist system. This scene reveals how the play, written almost forty years ago, is still thematically relevant today. Even non-communist governments apply the principles of "spin" and manipulation to their relations with the people they are, at least theoretically, supposed to serve, and so the manipulations of Ballas and the others seem all too familiar.

Another important symbol of the power of government and bureaucracy appears in the form of the fire extinguisher, which represents governmental power to reduce the flames of passion, individuality and independent thought. The fact that Gross takes his with him represents that he's leaving his job with what little power he did have, which he comes to see later in the play as the same kind of power claimed by Ballas. The audience sees through the action of the remainder of the play how he comes to realize this power has been misused and his growing determination to find ways to gain more humanistic power and influence.

Act 1, Scene 5

Act 1, Scene 5 Summary

Back in the Training Center, Lear continues his lecture. He's interrupted by Gross, who comes in with his fire extinguisher and asks whether it's possible for Lear to translate his memo. Lear says he'd be happy to, provided Gross can prove his interest in Ptydepe is essential and that he's not just trying to disrupt the class. He tells Gross to sit and then goes on to explain to the class how the different usages of the same word in traditional language are each given a different word in Ptydepe.

The example he uses is the word "boo," He defines its different usages through examples using office relationships, whether an employee wants to startle an employer, a fellow employee or a subordinate, whether the subject of the startling knows it's coming and other examples. He quizzes both Gross and Thumb, but only Thumb knows the answers. Lear interprets Gross' lack of knowledge as proof that his request for a translation isn't valid. He refuses to do it and dismisses him from the class. Gross goes, taking his fire extinguisher with him. Lear asks Thumb another question. Thumb gives the correct answer, and Lear awards him another A.

Act 1, Scene 5 Analysis

The principle function of this scene is to further define how Gross is being manipulated. This is done mainly through the various definitions Lear uses of the word "boo," all of which have to do with the kind of surprise, or ambush, Gross has been experiencing throughout the play. The fact that he doesn't know the answers symbolizes how he doesn't really know, yet, that he's been ambushed. Meanwhile, the fact that Gross continues to carry his fire extinguisher symbolizes his continued intent to hold on to what power he has left, power that in this scene seems to be rapidly fading away. Ironically, Gross' lack of knowledge excludes him from knowledge. Only those who already know what is going on are allowed information.

Act 1, Scene 6

Act 1, Scene 6 Summary

Back in the Translation Center, there are the sounds of a birthday party offstage as Gross, still carrying his fire extinguisher, comes in. Maria comes in with a bag of limes and goes out. The audience hears Helena telling her to put them down. Maria comes back in, and Gross asks whether it would be possible for Helena to see him. Maria goes out to ask. She comes back in, asking why Gross is no longer Managing Director. After Gross explains what happened, she tells him he might have to wait a while for Helena to come in. Helena calls for Maria, and she goes out, leaving Gross alone.

After a brief conversation between George and Gross about how long the party is going to be, the sounds of the party fade into silence. Stroll and Savant pass through, talking in half-Ptydepe about an affair Savant had with a young girl. Helena comes in, suggesting they have some coffee. Stroll asks where Maria is, and Savant jokes about how sexy she is. Then Savant suggests that Gross might know where she is, saying he lusts after her and that the staff watcher heard him call her sweetheart. Helena explains that Maria is doing some ironing for her and shouts offstage to find out where the coffee maker is. Maria runs on with an iron in her hand, gets out the coffee maker and the coffee and runs out again. Savant apologizes for not offering Gross any coffee, saying there's only enough for three. Savant and Stroll then light cigars. Gross tries to buy one, but Stroll tells him he'd be making a mistake to have one.

As Savant and Stroll talk about how good life is with goose, parties and cigars, Helena repeatedly shouts to Maria for help in making the coffee. Maria repeatedly runs in and out to do as Helena asks, and Helena explains to Gross the complex regulations for getting a document translated. As the coffee is served, Helena, Savant and Stroll converse in Ptydepe as Gross repeatedly tries to get their attention. Finally, he shouts for them to be quiet. They all fall silent, but not because of him. Ballas and Pillar have just come in. As Gross talks about the paradoxically complicated rules for getting a translation, which actually prohibit any translation, Maria comes in and listens.

Gross concludes his increasingly angry speech by asking what can be done to get out of the vicious bureaucratic circle. Ballas tells him he has no choice but to learn Ptydepe. As Gross reacts to his presence with concern, Ballas tells him that his negative behavior is inexcusable. Gross suddenly confesses to being guilty of disrespect, of fraudulent use of funds in relation to the purchase of the logbook and of inappropriate use of the rubber stamp. He asks for the most severe punishment possible, and Ballas, as always referring to Pillar for confirmation, suggests that Gross should be fired. Pillar silently agrees. Ballas tells Gross to come in the following morning to discuss his dismissal and calls George out of hiding, saying he can be the new deputy. He tells Gross that he can leave and then goes out, accompanied by Pillar, Helena, Stroll and Savant.

Maria offers Gross the cigar box, but Gross doesn't see her. Helena looks in and tells Maria to go out and buy her some melons, saying that if she hurries she can actually have a taste. Maria puts down the cigar box and runs out. Gross takes his fire extinguisher and leaves. George comes out from behind the wall, takes a cigar and goes out.

Act 1, Scene 6 Analysis

The motif, or repeated image, of Gross being kept out of the loop is repeated and expanded in this scene as the audience vividly experiences his exclusion from conversations, the shifting manipulations of power and control around him and above all the way that that control pressures him into conforming. In short, this scene functions not only as satire on the way that bureaucracy crushes the spirit of independence and freedom of those caught in its net, and not only as a warning of the dangers of socialist philosophy and government. It also serves as a warning against conformity in general.

It demonstrates the way any kind of power can dominate and manipulate, putting pressure on an individual like Gross, who simply desires to make a living according to his own personal belief systems, to do as the "group" demands and to function their way or lose everything. His cries for an explanation become despairing shouts for attention of any kind, recognition of his value as a human being with a mind and thoughts of his own. We also see how that need for recognition can lead individuals to devalue themselves, as Gross allows himself to be placed in a job that's inferior both morally and in terms of status within the company solely so that he can keep his job.

The one spark of hope in this scene is Maria, whose offering of the cigar box represents the possibility that there is value left in Gross' life and beliefs. The irony, of course, is that he doesn't see her, an image that suggests that at this point in his life he can see no hope at all. He goes out clutching his fire extinguisher to him in the same way as he's clutching what little dignity he has left. In his exit, and in George's triumphant stealing of a cigar, the audience sees how the soul of a good man, and therefore the souls of all humanity, can be crushed by those who have no regard for intelligent questioning, reasonable beliefs and the desire to think freely.

Act 2, Scene 7

Act 2, Scene 7 Summary

This scene is set in what used to be Gross' office but is now Ballas.' Accompanied, as always, by Pillar, Ballas comes in and looks through the mail, in the same way as Gross did at the beginning of Act 1. He too reads aloud a memo in Ptydepe and asks Pillar whether he understands it. When Pillar shakes his head, Ballas complains that he might have learned it by this point. Stroll comes in and asks to speak with Pillar. They both go out again, and Ballas seems surprised that Pillar is actually being sought after.

Gross comes in, still carrying his fire extinguisher and reminding Ballas they were supposed to talk about his dismissal. Ballas tells him to come back later, and Gross goes. Pillar returns, and Ballas asks him what Stroll wanted. Pillar says nothing. Hana comes in, sits and combs her hair as Ballas asks whether she can read Ptydepe. She says that she doesn't, explaining that the classes were too hard and asking permission to get the milk. Ballas gives her permission, and she goes out. Savant looks in and asks to speak with Pillar. Pillar goes out, and Gross comes back in. Ballas again tells him to come back later. Gross goes, and Pillar comes back. Ballas asks what Savant wanted, and again Pillar says nothing.

Hana comes back in with milk, sits, drinks and combs her hair as she explains how difficult it is to learn Ptydepe, reminding Ballas that he too dropped out of the class. She says that people are suggesting Ptydepe is based on doubtful principles. She asks to get the rolls, and Ballas tells her to go. When she's gone, he turns angrily to the silent Pillar and tells him he says too much. Helena comes in, asking to see Pillar. Pillar goes, and Ballas gets angry. Gross comes in, and Ballas tells him to go. When Gross starts to leave, Ballas calls him back, saying he might have been too harsh the day before and explaining that among the many people around at the time there might have been someone who would have reported him. He offers Gross the position of Staff Watcher. Gross accepts, and Ballas tells him he can start right away. Gross thanks him and goes out.

Pillar returns and again remains silent when Ballas asks him what Helena wanted. Hana comes back in with the rolls, sits and combs her hair, as Ballas asks who's been saying Ptydepe is based on doubtful principles. Hana tells him everybody except him feels that way, and she says that it's only a matter of time before he finds out. He asks her to look at his memo to see if she can figure it out, and she tells him it's either a protest against Ptydepe or a report on the last audit. Ballas reacts angrily and says he's going out for lunch. Hana tells that him he'll enjoy it; it's goulash today.

Act 2, Scene 7 Analysis

Another aspect to the play's satirical message about the pointlessness of bureaucracy is made in this scene, as the audience sees the cycle of miscommunication, manipulation and power games begin to repeat itself. Ballas behaves, and is treated, in exactly the same way as Gross was treated earlier, illustrating how bureaucracy simultaneously feeds and recycles itself.

At the same time, Hana's repetition of the shopping sequence from Act 1 and the repetition of the lunch motif takes the point even further. It suggests that no matter how important bureaucratic games are to the people playing them, they are less important to regular people who are just trying to live regular lives. Also, Hana's shopping, and later in this act Maria's shopping, reinforce the larger thematic point about the socialist/communist system. No matter what is going on within it, the system itself has a life of its own, and the manipulations of people struggling for power and security don't really matter. The system will continue no matter what.

The repeated entrances and exits of the various characters, many more than were in the equivalent scene in Act 1, function on two levels. On a technical level, they create a sense of pace and energy, a building momentum that increases as the rest of the act unfolds. On a metaphoric level, they represent the comparative speed with which the bureaucratic net is closing around Ballas more quickly and urgently than it closed around Gross. This combines with Hana's comments that everybody except Ballas is complaining about Ptydepe to suggest that Stroll, Savant and Helena are circling like sharks around a wounded fish. They smell blood and are circling in for the kill, preparing to take advantage of Ballas' bureaucratic vulnerability to advance their own positions and increase their own power.

The repeated requests for conversation with Pillar foreshadow the role he plays in Ballas' eventual downfall, the same role Ballas himself played in Gross'. Also, Gross being offered the job of Staff Watcher reinforces his gradual rise back to a position of authority and influence, a key component of the action for the rest of the play.

Act 2, Scene 8

Act 2, Scene 8 Summary

The setting is the Ptydepe Classroom. Again Lear is lecturing, but at this point there is only one student, Thumb. Lear conducts a lesson as Gross passes through, still carrying his fire extinguisher. After he's gone, Lear quizzes Thumb on what he remembers of the lesson just passed. At first, Thumb continues to get all the answers right, but he becomes more and more confused and more and more mistaken. Lear finally has enough and dismisses him from the classroom. After he's gone, Lear continues his lecture to an empty row of chairs.

Act 2, Scene 8 Analysis

This brief scene functions on two levels. On a plot level it reiterates the point made earlier that enthusiasm for, and knowledge of, Ptydepe within the company is declining to the point where it's practically non-existent. On a symbolic level, it reinforces the earlier thematic point first discussed in relation to Act 1, Scene 3, the hope for eventual triumph of individuality and freedom over socialist/ communist oppression. Lear's lecture to an empty classroom represents the possibility that one day, the all-important and all-impressive system will itself be lecturing to an empty room, that there will be no support for it either politically or socially and that its power will one day end.

Act 2, Scene 9, Part 1

Act 2, Scene 9, Part 1 Summary

Maria comes into the Translation Center with a bag of onions and takes them out to Helena, who tells her offstage to put them aside. Maria comes back in, starts work, stops, takes out a hat and mirror and tries the hat on. Gross, from offstage, tells her that it suits her. Maria hurriedly puts away the hat and mirror as Gross tells her not to worry. He tells her who he is and says that he's the new Staff Watcher. Maria tells him that she'd already found him a new job in her brother's theater company. Gross talks about how he feels about being able to look at Maria all the time, and Maria becomes embarrassed. Helena comes in and tells her to go out and get some limes.

Ballas comes in, his memo in his hand. He looks around, sees no one, sits and searches his pockets for cigarettes in the same way Gross did earlier. Ballas asks whether Gross is there. When Gross responds, Ballas asks for a report on what he's seen. Gross gives him the report, and Ballas tells him he's doing a good job. Ballas asks what he's heard about Ptydepe, and when Gross says he doesn't quite know what to say, Ballas tells him that he's got a moral duty to tell him exactly what he's heard. Before Gross can say anything, Stroll comes in. Ballas asks how the translations are going, and Stroll says he's only done one. As Ballas is trying to find out why he's done so few, Savant comes in. He starts to go out again by another door, but Ballas asks him to stay. Stroll explains how difficult the process of translation to and from Ptydepe is, saying that each individual word must be discussed with whoever wrote the original memo to define what was meant so that the right Ptydepe word can be used. He and Savant talk about how little members of staff seem to understand what they mean and how few have actually learned Ptydepe. Ballas tells them they have to speed things up, saying that it doesn't matter if the occasional word is translated incorrectly.

Pillar looks in. Ballas doesn't see him, but Stroll does and says that he's got to go to a meeting. Pillar disappears, and Stroll goes out. Savant is about to follow when Ballas asks him how well Ptydepe is really doing. Savant says that he doesn't really have any statistics available and can't say. Helena comes in and also starts to go out by another door, but Ballas asks her to stay. He continues to talk with Savant, who explains that in other offices, the more Ptydepe is used the more it begins to take on individual characteristics similar to those in the language it's replaced. Ballas asks what can be done to prevent Ptydepe from being contaminated. Pillar looks in, again unseen by Ballas but noticed by Savant, who says he's got to go to a meeting and leaves. Ballas and Helena talk briefly about the progress of Ptydepe being stuck. Pillar looks in again and is again unnoticed by Ballas. Helena says she's got to go to a meeting and goes out.

Alone in the room, Ballas tells Gross that their confrontation the previous day was just a show for the sake of the others. He asks to call Gross by his first name and then tells him to come out and take over as his deputy. As Gross comes out, Ballas becomes

upset, wondering what happened to all his plans for Ptydepe and all the work he did to get it started. He tells Gross that if they work together, they'll create something spectacular. Gross seems about to protest, but Ballas cuts him off, telling him to get George and put him back to work in his old job as Staff Watcher. Gross goes out. Ballas searches his pockets and again finds no cigarettes.

One by one, Stroll, Savant and Helena come back in. One by one, Ballas tries to restart his conversations with them, and one by one, they refer his questions to each other. Finally, Helena explains that she can't issue any authorizations for translations until she finds out whether they conflict with the content of the memos, which she can't read because they haven't been translated because the translation hasn't been authorized. Ballas, Stroll, Savant and Helena argue in circles about who has what authority, with Ballas finally asking angrily who invented this system, and Stroll, Savant and Helena shouting that it was him. Ballas quickly rearranges the process and orders the translation of his memo. Stroll reads it, revealing that it's a protest from the members of the Accounts Department who are unhappy about being moved out of their offices to make room for the Translation Center. Ballas says he's heard enough, dismisses them and goes out. Pillar looks in, beckoning to Stroll, Savant and Helena. They go out with him.

Act 2, Scene 9, Part 1 Analysis

The main purpose of this scene is to continue the development of both plot and momentum established in Act 2, Scene 7. Momentum is built up through the repeated entrances and exits, through the short quick lines that make up the circular arguments between the other bureaucrats and through the sense of increasing desperation in Ballas. This, in turn, relates to the way in which the plot is developed. Once again the audience sees how the same thing that Ballas did to Gross is being done to Ballas, an idea reinforced when Ballas acts in the same way as Gross did earlier - searching for cigarettes, confronting other bureaucrats and becoming increasingly frustrated. The difference is that Ballas gets answers from Stroll, Savant and Helena in a way that Gross never really did, answers that illustrate the way the ambitious, manipulative net cast by the others is winding even more tightly around him.

Another difference appears in the way Ballas appears determined to fight back, as indicated when he restructures the translation process, offers Gross a new job and talks of plans for the future. This difference shows Gross how much of a fighter he needs to be, an element of the story that becomes important later in the play and in particular in the latter part of the scene, in which he encourages Maria to develop and nurture her spirit of independence. This development in their relationship is foreshadowed by their brief conversation at the beginning of the scene, in which Maria clearly demonstrates an independence of thought by trying on a hat at her desk. Gross indirectly, but nevertheless meaningfully, encourages her. There are glimmers of a romantic relationship between them, but because the play's themes are more related to intellectual rather than romantic freedom, the relationship is defined in another way, as illustrated in the following section.

Act 2, Scene 9, Part 2

Act 2, Scene 9, Part 2 Summary

Gross and George enter. George angrily goes back behind the wall to resume his job as Staff Watcher, and a moment later he throws Gross' fire extinguisher out at him. Maria returns, and Gross explains he's been made Ballas' deputy. Maria congratulates him, and Gross says he'd have preferred to remain Staff Watcher. They talk about how in that job, he'd have to worry less about the other bureaucrats. Gross invites her to visit him in his office someday and starts to leave, but Maria calls to him to wait, asking whether anyone has translated his memorandum. Gross says that nobody has, adding that he expects the worst because of what happened with the rubber stamp. Maria tells him that if he wants to prove his innocence, he has to fight to do it, saying that truth will always win out as long as people don't back down from fighting for what they believe in.

Gross wonders aloud what Maria knows about the way the world works. Then, he talks at length about how he's always been more of a dreamer than a doer, how he gave in to people and trusted too much and how he belongs to a generation that talked more than acted. He also talks about how he plans to be different if he gets the chance and about his plans to make a new beginning. Maria asks for the memo, and when Gross worries what will happen to her if she gets caught, she says that she knows what she's doing. She then translates the memo, which says that the recent audit of Gross' department revealed that the rumors about misuse of the rubber stamp were completely unfounded and that he has been proven to be a conscientious and good worker. The memo also says that his position against Ptydepe is respected and supported, that Ptydepe is believed by the higher-ups to be anti-humanist and that he's urged to stop any plans to implement its use as soon and as firmly as possible. Gross thanks Maria, says he's got a chance to prove himself, promises to not back down and starts to go. Maria says that she likes him. Gross replies that he has to earn her respect and sympathy and goes out. After he's gone, George, from behind the wall, tells Maria that she just did a stupid thing. As Helena, offstage, asks where her limes are, Maria says she's afraid that she realizes exactly what she did.

Act 2, Scene 9, Part 2 Analysis

The second part of Scene 9 focuses on the play's second thematic point, about the necessity for individual thought and action when faced with oppression. The statement is made first by George throwing Gross' fire extinguisher at him. Since, as has been discussed, the extinguisher represents what little power Gross has left, its return to him suggests that the opportunity for him to use that power is finally upon him. This point is reiterated through the conversation with Maria, in which Gross is forcefully reminded that the humanist beliefs he's previously espoused have to be acted upon and not just talked about. In making this realization, in taking up his fire extinguisher/power and in vowing to fight for what he's believed in all along, he reminds us that we share his

responsibility to act with courage, independence of thought and defiance of oppressive authority.

Meanwhile, the content of the memo is, of course, ironic and comic. The audience, like Gross, can see clearly what's happened. In order to consolidate and protect his bureaucratic position, Ballas has lied and manipulated Gross even more than we thought. We see how he, through his insistence upon the use of Ptydepe, has attempted to ensure that Gross, in just about every way, is removed from any position of power or influence. The action of the scene concludes on a note of suspense, as we're left wondering just how Gross is going to get out of the net Ballas has woven around him and what is going to happen to Maria.

Act 2, Scene 10

Act 2, Scene 10 Summary

The setting is what is now Ballas' office. As Hana combs her hair, Ballas searches his pockets for cigarettes. Gross comes in triumphantly, telling him the contents of the memo. His long speech is interrupted by Ballas, who tells Hana to go out and get the chocolates and also bring him some cigarettes. After Hana goes out, Gross continues, explaining that he's been told to end the use of Ptydepe and that he intends to do just that. Pillar looks in. Ballas tells him to go away, and he goes. Ballas asks Gross to repeat what he just said, and Gross does. Hana comes in with chocolates and cigarettes and goes back to combing her hair. Ballas lights a cigarette, as Gross excitedly talks about his intent to run his department on more humanist principles.

Pillar looks in again, and Ballas tells him again to go away. Gross talks further about the humanist values he plans to implement and tells Ballas to get away from his desk. Ballas offers him a cigarette, and Gross refuses. After a brief argument, Ballas tells him that he agrees with Gross. He says that Ptydepe is all nonsense, that he made a mistake and that it's time for him to face the consequences. Pillar looks in once again, and once again Ballas tells him to leave. When Gross tells him he's confused, Ballas says he's relieved to finally be able to reveal his feelings and promises to help him in any way he can. He again offers Gross a cigarette, again Gross refuses. As Ballas insists, Gross insists upon knowing just how Ballas plans to help him.

Ballas says that he plans to stay on as Gross' deputy. Gross says that he wants Ballas to leave, and he says he's not going to be back down. Ballas shows him a memorandum that Gross signed earlier, authorizing the introduction of Ptydepe (from Act 1, Scene 4). In a speech that is a deliberate echo of several other speeches, Ballas explains at length how the authorization memo proves Gross' complicity in the whole scheme. Gross suggests that they both resign, and Ballas says he doesn't see why he should. Gross backs down and asks whether Ballas will truly help him, and Ballas says he will. He again offers Gross a cigarette, and Gross takes one, saying that someone will have to take the consequences of the Ptydepe fiasco. Ballas says that can be left to him, and he calls in Pillar.

Pillar comes in, followed by Stroll, Savant and Helena, who speak in unison a protest against Ptydepe. Ballas speaks at length about his concern about Ptydepe, his acceptance of responsibility, the steps he's taken to rectify the situation, the return of Gross to the position of Managing Director and his own return to the position of Deputy Director. Gross says that he accepts Ballas' apology, that he's grateful for the appearance of the protestors and that the important thing to consider at the moment is the future. The protestors continue, saying they've put their whole lives into supporting the wrong cause and want to know who is responsible. Ballas says that everyone is responsible, but the protestors say that that means nothing. Ballas then tells them that

all along, there has been someone in their department about whom nobody really knows anything.

That person has been watching them all, manipulating the use of Ptydepe, and has manipulated his way into the protest because there's no point in supporting Ptydepe anymore. Everyone turns to look at Pillar, who shouts a slogan against Ptydepe and in favor of natural language and runs out. A moment later, Column comes in, and Gross speaks about how everyone must work together to restore natural language. He seems about to go on when Ballas interrupts him and suggests that the conversation can continue tomorrow. The protestors and Column agree, and Stroll, Savant and Helena go out. Ballas refers to Column in the same way as he's always referred to Pillar and goes out.

As Gross comments on how quickly things are changing, Hana asks repeatedly whether she can go for lunch. Gross finally hears her and gives her permission. Hana runs out. Ballas and Column appear, also going for lunch, as Gross talks again about how he'd do everything differently. Ballas tells him that he'd end up in exactly the same place and goes out. Gross hangs up his fire extinguisher, picks up a knife and fork and goes out.

Act 2, Scene 10 Analysis

The victory of bureaucracy, as represented by Ballas, seems almost complete in this scene. This is represented first by the way he tells Hana to get the chocolates, rather than waiting to be asked if she can go, and second by the symbolic use of cigarettes. Because cigarettes throughout the play have represented the futility of struggle against the system, the fact that Ballas obtains and smokes them, as well as forcing Gross to smoke, represents what Ballas thinks is his triumph over the system and over Gross. This is also represented by the way he manipulates Gross' attempts at reasserting control. Ballas is actually very clever in this scene, letting Gross reveal what information and power he thinks he has, listening as Gross reveals the contents of the memo and then turning what he hears to his own advantage. In other words, he knows from the memo that the higher-ups don't support him the way he thought, so he changes his position to agree with what he knows they do agree with - hatred of Ptydepe. He then manipulates Gross and the protestors into supporting his power and authority in the new circumstances, using Pillar as a scapegoat for their resentment.

The protest is a particularly interesting part of the scene, and indeed of the play. Firstly, it reiterates a warning against blind support of the communist/socialist system. This is the result of how the protest is phrased, with the characters' reference to giving their lives for a wrong cause suggesting a much larger "wrong cause" supported by many more people and on a much larger scale - that is to say, socialist government. What's also interesting is the way the protestors, including Gross, are easily won over and manipulated by Ballas, who as previously stated, is a symbol of the system. What's even more interesting than that is the identity of the one character who isn't won over - Pillar, whose name can easily be interpreted as symbolic of his relationship to the system, an idea reinforced by the name of his replacement, Column. Both names

suggest that the responsibility of silent spying and listening are the "pillars" or "columns" for the system, its essential means of support. Therefore, the fact that Pillar rebels and shouts out his support for natural language makes the point that what supports the system will eventually fall. The system will collapse, and humanism will eventually triumph.

That triumph, however, doesn't seem all that possible at the end of the scene, as Gross has clearly been outmaneuvered and seems to have nothing left but to eat, in terms of lunch and in terms of humiliation, what the system gives him.

Act 2, Scene 11

Act 2, Scene 11 Summary

The setting is again the Ptydepe Classroom. All four clerks, including Thumb, listen attentively as Lear analyzes the mistakes behind Ptydepe. As he talks, Ballas and Column come in, cross the room and go out, clearly on their way to lunch. Lear continues, referring to how people using Ptydepe completely lost track of what and how they were trying to communicate. Gross crosses the stage, also clearly on his way to lunch, but then he stops and listens as Lear talks about the introduction of a new operating language, Chorukor, which corrects all the mistakes of Ptydepe. Thumb jumps up and asks for an example. Lear demonstrates and then asks Thumb to follow his example. Thumb does, successfully, and gets another A. Lear continues his lecture.

Act 2, Scene 11 Analysis

Once again, the idea of the repeated cycle appears. Anew universal language is introduced, and the cycles of instruction (as represented by Lear) and sucking up (as represented by Thumb) continue. The principle of bureaucratic living and working with in the system (as represented by Ballas and Column focusing on getting their lunch) proceeds unchecked.

Act 2, Scene 12

Act 2, Scene 12 Summary

The setting is the Translation Center. Offstage, sounds of a party can be heard, as Maria stands at her desk, sobbing. Ballas and Column are confronting her. Ballas says that he promised Gross he wouldn't slack off on his first day and then asks whom the party is for. Maria tells him, and he and Column start to leave.

Gross comes in, excitedly shouting about the new language being developed and saying to Ballas that he thought they had an agreement that there would be no new languages. Ballas tells him that ending Ptydepe doesn't mean that there will not be any new languages. He says that the issue of communication efficiency must still be addressed. He goes on to say that he clearly sees Gross having difficulty in his job. He considers it his duty to intervene, and when Gross offers to let him have the job as Managing Director again, he says that they're both suited to the jobs they're in. He and Column go out to join the party.

Maria tells Gross that George saw her translate the memo. He told Ballas, who fired her because there was no guarantee she wouldn't do an inappropriate translation of Chorukor, and she asks whether Gross can get the decision reversed. This leads Gross to speak at length about how everyone is living in a strange time of scientific advances but regressions in human communication. He says humanity is losing track of itself, caught between what it truly is and what it expects of itself. He then explains to Maria that he can't help her get back her job because he can't risk losing his own, saying that it's important that he stay where he is because he has to fight the influence of Ballas and others like him from within.

All the other characters appear, waiting for Gross to join them at lunch. He tells Maria that leaving the department is an opportunity for her to be fully human and suggests that she join her brother's theater troupe. If she does, she must not lose hope or her faith in people. He then says that he has to go and have his lunch, and he bids her goodbye. He joins the other characters. Maria says that nobody has ever spoken so nicely to her. The other characters leave. Maria puts on her new hat and also goes out.

Act 2, Scene 12 Analysis

More clearly than anything else in the play, this climactic scene makes the thematic point that oppression of any kind, the determination to remove individuality and independence of thought form the human race, must be resisted at all costs and in any way. Gross essentially tells Maria that he'll do his best to fight it from within, but he also says that her freedom to fight it from without is more important, simply because it's freedom. It's at this point that the bureaucracy satirized throughout the play most vividly appears as a metaphor for the totalitarian, anti-humanist socialist/ communist system.

Theater, as referred to in Gross' final speech to Maria, is revealed to be an important weapon in the resistance to that system. The implication here is that the freedom of thought and emotional expression found in plays must also become the medium of communication of society.

Whether Gross will find a way to effectively fight his fight or whether he will remain trapped in the bureaucratic, systemically supported cycle of manipulation and betrayal is a question the play doesn't directly answer. It might be argued that there is an indirect answer in Gross' joining the other characters for lunch, which represents his defeat and his being absorbed by the system. It might also be argued that even if he's unable to continue the fight, Maria will. She is, after all, the symbol of hope, and her escape from the office suggests that even in the face of oppression, there is always freedom, as represented by her putting on her hat, and there is always hope, as represented by her departure.

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Characters

Jan Ballas

Jan Ballas is the deputy director of the organization, under managing director Josef Gross. With silent constant companion Ferdinand Pillar (later replaced by Mr. Column), Ballas undermines the authority of his superior. Ballas is cold and calculating, always trying to increase his power. It is Ballas who orders the introduction of Ptydepe, and overrules Gross's objections by blackmail. Such moves get Ballas the managing directorship. However, once he is in the position of power, Pillar begins to betray him and Ballas grows paranoid. Ballas also gets stuck in the bureaucratic mire surrounding the translation of documents in Ptydepe. After Gross forces his way back into his original job, Ballas again survives because of his calculated earlier move. Gross would have him leave entirely, but Ballas's blackmail gets him the deputy directorship back.

Mr. Column

Mr. Column replaces Pillar as Ballas's constant companion and silent supporter in scene 10 after Pillar's outburst.

George

George is the staff watcher for the office. He sits in the space between the offices and watches everyone's actions. George can interact with staff members via a chink in the wall. When Gross is fired by Ballas, George is temporarily hired as deputy director. Gross temporarily becomes the staff watcher for a while as well. When Gross becomes managing director again, George returns to the staff watcher position. It is he who catches Maria translating the memorandum for Gross, leading to her termination as an employee.

Josef Gross

Josef Gross is the central character in *The Memorandum.* He is the managing director for the organization, though his power seems limited and is often challenged. Gross receives a memorandum written in a new artificial language, Ptydepe, and becomes frustrated when he cannot get the document translated due to organizational bureaucracy and staff indifference. Gross's power is also undermined by his deputy director, Ballas. Ballas ordered the introduction of the language without Gross's knowledge. Gross agrees to step down to the deputy position, and then is fired because of Ballas. Gross later retakes the managing directorship after he convinces Maria to translate the memorandum for him. The memorandum praises Gross's human touch in the office. At the end of the play, Gross will not reconsider Ballas's firing of Maria, letting her lose her job though she helped him regain his. Gross's power is firmly entrenched.

Hana

Hana is the secretary to the managing director. She does little actual work. Hana spends most of her time brushing her hair and running to the shops to get food items. She does provide Gross, and later Ballas, with information on occasion, but does not do much else.

Helena

Helena works in the translation center as a chairman of something unspecified. Like Stroll and Savant, Helena is an indifferent part of the bureaucracy. She follows the rules and goes along with what will allow her to keep her job. Helena is often concerned with sending Maria to get food items, as well attending birthday parties and flirting with her co-workers. She refuses to help Gross translate his memorandum.

Maria

Maria is the secretary in the translation center. She is often sent on errands to get food items by Helena. While Maria wants to hold on to her job, she is more sympathetic and human than most other characters. When Gross loses his job, she arranges for him to work at a theater company. Though Gross does not take thejob, this gesture is aprime example of her generosity. Empathetic of Gross's situation, Maria finally translates the memorandum for him, though it is against the rules and George, the staff watcher, overhears. After he regains his post as managing director, Gross declines to overturn Ballas's firing of Maria for translating the document. Heartened by Gross's "nice" words of encouragement, Maria happily leaves the organization.

Ferdinand Pillar

Ferdinand Pillar is the silent constant companion of Ballas. They seem to be co-conspirators, with Pillar being Ballas's loyal employee. After Ballas gets the managing directorship, Pillar leaves with various employees of the translation center in what seems like scheme to undermine Ballas. This seeming betrayal unnerves Ballas. After Gross regains the managing director position, and Ballas is about to reveal Pillar's treachery concerning Ptydepe's fall from grace, the silent man speaks for the first time in support of natural human speech. Pillar then leaves and does not return. Mr. Column replaces him as Ballas's silent partner.

Alex Savant

Alex Savant is the graduate Ptydepist, part of the translation office. Like Stroll and Helena, Savant is an indifferent part of the bureaucracy. He follows the rules and goes along with what is best for his continued employment. He likes to eat lunch, go to office

parties, and talk about women. Savant refuses to translate Gross's memorandum without the proper authorization. Savant often speaks in Ptydepe, but at one point admits that no one knows the language really well.

Mark Lear

Mark Lear is the Ptydepe teacher in the Ptydepe classroom. He goes on and on about the background of the language in an attempt to teach it to his clerk-students. While he offers to translate Gross's memorandum for him as a classroom exercise if Gross shows himself to be a sincere student. Lear believes that Gross fails to, and refuses to translate the document.

Otto Stroll

Otto Stroll is the head of the organization's translation center. Like Savant and Helena, he is an indifferent bureaucrat, who follows the rules and goes along with what is best for his survival in the office. Stroll does nothing to help Gross's efforts to get the memorandum translated, save relating the regulations involved. He also will not share his cigars with Gross. Stroll is more concerned with eating lunch, going to office birthday parties, and talking about women.

Peter Thumb

Peter Thumb is the eager clerk/student in Lear's language classroom. Thumb constantly asks questions, and at one point, gets thrown out of the class for interfering with the education of the other students. By that time, he is the last one left. Thumb is not particularly bright, but very enthusiastic.

Themes

Absurdity

The Memorandum is a play full of absurdities, most related to Gross's problematic memorandum. The language that the memorandum is written is at the core of the absurdity. Ptydepe is an artificial language that is supposed to be more efficient for office communication. Yet the language is cumbersome, repetitive, and hard to learn. Only a few at the office actually know it. The absurdity grows as Gross tries to get the memorandum translated. A catch-22 of bureaucracy prevents anyone in the organization's translation center from actually translating the document for him. Anyone who receives a memo in Ptydepe can only get a Ptydepe text translated after the memorandum has been translated, an absurd paradox. A similarly contradictory circle exists in getting authorization for the translation from the bureaucrats. Gross tries to get around this situation by going to Lear's Ptydepe class to get the memorandum translated. But he is thrown out of the class for being doubtful about the language, closing another means of getting the document translated. In the end, Gross gets the memorandum translated by Maria. She only does it out of pity for him, and ends up losing her job in the process. The play's absurdities are Havel's comment on the economic structure of life under communism in Czechoslovakia and the rest of the Eastern Bloc, where everyone was employed but the jobs were often meaningless.

Betrayal and Deception

Several characters in The Memorandum engage in betrayal and deception, adding to the absurdity of the play. Ballas continually works to undermine his superior, Gross, betraying and deceiving him at every turn. Ballas uses the fact that Gross brought the bank endorsement rubber stamp home to do work as blackmail to get him to sign one document. Ballas also does not tell Gross that he ordered the introduction of Ptydepe straight out in the beginning, behind Gross's back. Ballas also ordered the introduction of a translation center, moved the accounts department to the basement, and instructed all staff member, save Gross, to take Ptydepe classes, bypassing Gross entirely. Ballas blackmails him again, getting him to sign a supplementary order for the introduction of Ptydepe. This is used in another blackmail scheme of Ballas's. All of Ballas's deceptions pay off in the end, to some degree. Though he gains, then loses, the managing directorship, he uses the advantage gained by his numerous betrayals to keep his job when Gross wants to get rid of him.

Other characters engage in similar betrayals and deceptions. Pillar conspires with those in the translation center against Ballas, before Ballas accuses Pillar of being against Ptydepe from the beginning. Everyone's actions are monitored by George, the staff watcher, who does his work from an office located between the walls of everyone else's work space. It is George's observations that leads to Gross's only major deception of the play. George catches Maria translating Gross's memorandum, and reports the

action to Ballas. Ballas orders her firing, and Gross does not overturn it, despite the fact that her translation led to his regaining the managing director's job. Betrayal and deception are a fundamental part of the life depicted in The Memorandum. The bureaucracy seems to function on it.

Individual versus Machine

Gross is a man caught in the wheels of the bureaucratic machine. No matter what he does, he cannot escape its teeth. If it is not Ballas and Pillar using the details of bureaucratic paperwork to manipulate Gross into doing their will, the demands of getting approval so that the translation center will translate his memorandum ensnare him. For a time, Gross loses his job, until Pillar begins to conspire against Ballas. Ballas also becomes caught in the bureaucratic machine, and is as frustrated as Gross.

The only way that Gross can succeed in his goal to get the memorandum is to go outside of the machine. Maria, the translation center secretary, finally feels sorry for him and does the translation. The memorandum praises Gross for his human touch as a bureaucrat. This tiny rebellion against the machine leads to Maria's firing, but Gross will not save her job. He sends her off with human-like words of support. His position relatively secure, Gross seems to accept that he is a cog in the machine at the end of *The Memorandum.*

Style

Setting

An absurdist play, *The Memorandum* takes place in a group of offices in Havel's contemporary place and time. That is, Czechoslovakia in the mid-1960s, when the country was under the rule of Soviet-aligned communists. Under this system, everyone was employed in jobs that were sometimes meaningless and redundant. Each of the three offices is essentially the same, with the furniture arranged differently. Unseen at the conjunction of the offices is the space of the staff watcher, George. His job is to spy on everyone else and make sure they are following the rules. This setting emphasizes oppressive atmosphere and the uniformity of attitudes among those who work in the offices.

Language

At the center of *The Memorandum* is an artificial language, Ptydepe. This language is supposed to be more efficient and accurate than common vernacular in office communications. Lear tells his students that Ptydepe is scientific, rational, and precise, yet difficult, complex, and redundant. Words in Ptydepe are so long, they must be broken up into sub words. Common words, however, are the shortest of all. Only a few in the office even understand a little Ptydepe, and most drop out of the language classes because it was too hard to learn. Even Stroll, the head of the translation center, says that while they are in charge of translating documents, they are "no experts." Thus, translations, like the one that Gross so desperately seeks, are hard to come by.

Thus in the play, language is used as means of control. Since there are a limited number of speakers/translators and authorization for translations are hard to come by, power is held by those who know Ptydepe. This is Gross's central problem. Ptydepe is used all around, but he has no idea what is being said. Though he is managing director for most of the play, he does not have much real authority. Also, when Maria breaks the rules and translates Gross's memorandum for him, she ends up losing her job, for the breach of the rules concerning language is unacceptable. Though Ptydepe's flaws are seen by the end of the play, another artificial language will take its place: Chorukor.

Repetition

There is a certain amount of repetition in the action and dialogue of *The Memorandum*, which underscores the endless circle of redundancy of this office life. Conversations are repeated, nearly word for word, over and over again. For example, the managing director's secretary, Hana, constantly asks to leave to get a specific item at the store. She needs to fetch milk first, then the rolls, and so on each of the two days of the play. Hana also tells her superior that he will like the lunch they are serving that day. Similarly, every correct answer Thumb gets in Lear's Ptydepe class provokes this response from

the teacher: "Correct, Mr. Thumb. You get an A." There is a birthday party for a co-worker each day in the office adjacent to the translation center. As Ballas works against Gross in scenes 1-6, Pillar works against Ballas in scenes 7-11. When Gross explodes his frustrations at the bureaucratic catch-22 that is the translation center in scene 6, Ballas expresses nearly the same sentiments in scene 9. Though Ptydepe is the first artificial language that fails, it is not the last. Chuorukor will take its place. All these parallels show how unchanging the organization is at its core; only the topic of controversy varies.

Historical Context

In the mid-1960s, Czechoslovakia was part of the Warsaw Treaty Organization (also known as the Warsaw Pact). That is, the country was part of the Eastern Bloc, behind the Iron Curtain. Czechoslovakia was a communist country essentially controlled by the Soviet Union. The political regime that was in power in Czechoslovakia was somewhat repressive, though the situation would grow worse in 1968. To understand the situation in 1965, the country's history during and after World War II.

Just prior to and during World War II, the country was split apart by Nazi Germany. Slovakian nationalism became strong, as it would again in the mid-1990s, and Czechoslovakia was torn apart. For their part, independent Czech patriots were put in concentration camps. During the war, Czechs suffered greatly. After World War II ended, Czechoslovakia was liberated by the Soviet Union. Though many in Czechoslovakia called for American intervention, none was given. The country always identified more with the West than the East, but this history did not change the situation.

Initially, Czechoslovakia had a noncommunist president, though it was under the control of the Soviets. Communism soon pervaded the country, and by 1948, Czechoslovakia was firmly communist. New Soviet leader Josef Stalin imposed the Soviet system on Czechoslovakia. Former capitalists, like Havel's family, were stripped of their holdings, as were churches. All who disagreed with him were 'purged.'

By the mid-1960s, the Soviet economic model was firmly entrenched, and Czechoslovakia was dependent on the rest of the Soviet block. However, this had created serious economic problems for Czechoslovakia, led by president Antonin Novotny. The standard of living was low, compared to what Czechs were used to, though it was comparable to other Eastern Bloc countries. The agriculture industry was in shatters. The market was based on the premise that anything produced could be sold, though this was not true. Membership in and loyalty to the communist party guaranteed a person a better job, even if he or she was not qualified for it. Everyone who wanted a job was employed.

Faced with this faltering economic situation, reform measures were proposed in 1964 and 1965 that would have created a mixed economy. More private businesses would be allowed. Incentives would be offered for success. Prices, credit, and interest would interplay. More foreign trade would be allowed. Though initially approved, none of these reforms were actually implemented. Still, industry grew a little in 1965, but overall the economy would suffer for many years.

Despite this kind of communist control, before the 1968 crackdown, Czechoslovakia had something of an unrepressed intellectual and cultural life in the early and mid-1960s. There was more contact between Czechoslovakia and Western Europe. Films were being produced and seen outside of the country. Novels and plays described life under communism. There was some censorship, but writers, like Havel, still protested against those in power and promoted reform.

In 1968, however, Novotny was ousted by pressure brought by students and writers. He was soon replaced by a hard-line Soviet supporter, Gus-tav Husak, who took a strong stand against such agitators. Writers such as novelist Milan Kundera were driven out of the country. Czechoslovakia was more repressed than ever, and while writers such as Havel continued to protest for many years, it was not 1989 that Czechoslovakia emerged as a free country.

Critical Overview

Since *The Memorandum* made its debut in the United States in 1968, it has received near universal praise. Critics commented on the play's depth and cleverness, noting that while Havel was depicting life in communist-controlled Czechoslovakia, his themes were relevant to life in the west as well. An unnamed critic in Time writes, "no audience need live in a Communist country to feel the tickle of Havel's barbs it is enough to have experienced alienation in the midst of a scientific, computerized society. His main target is the mechanization of human beings."

Other American critics were surprised by the humanity of the play, often found in the details. Writing in the *New Yorker* Edith Oliver argues that "There are more than a few hints that the play, for all its high jinks [sic] in execution, is meant to be a tract about the power of the system to crush all the humanity and courage from a decent man, but I must say that its incidental scenes and small human touches are more enlightening as a picture of life in Czechoslovakia than its abstract whole." Along similar lines, Clive Barnes of the *New York Times* believes that "Gross's unavailing struggle against the tendrils of bureaucracy are very amusing but also and this is where Mr. Havel is particularly successful strangely touching. You really feel for the weak and vacillating Gross and for the little office girl who by helping him loses her own job."

Robert Hatch of *The Nation* is also among those who believe that Havel successfully balances depth with humor in *The Memorandum.* He writes, "Mr. Havel entertains himself, and his audience, with some speculation as to what usually lies behind the more passionate ideological disputes. Chiefly, he finds, it is a matter of whose initials will validate a chit a dominance too loosely guarded by those who enjoy it and hungered for with exaggerated appetite by those who do not."

The Memorandum was produced regularly over the years, including a London, England production in 1977. However, when the play was revived in London at the Orange Tree Theater in 1995, some critics believed the plays was showing its age. Absurdism was no longer in vogue, though the play's universality was still seen by as relevant by some. Many critics qualified their praise.

For example, while Jeremy Kingston of *The Times* wrote that "Havel writes amusing scenes in which this ghastly tongue [Ptydepe] is being taught ... but the play's real meat is the endless circling by Gross around the building, becoming ever deeper entangled in the deceit and betrayal." Later in his review, Kingston argued that "Shortly before the half-way mark the play is becalmed in repetition, and some of the Absurdist baggage has not worn well."

Similarly, Michael Billington of *The Guardian* believes that "What is impressive is how many targets Havel manages to hit in the course of the play." But Billington also writes that "Havel's concern with symmetry makes it hard for him to end the work when he should. But his writing also has a blithe playfulness."

Other London critics were more enthusiastic. Sarah Hemming of *Financial Times* echoes reviews of the 1968 New York production when she wrote "It is a funny and very clever play, and its revival ... reveals it to be just as pointed as at its premiere. The portrayal of an unwieldy bureaucracy, whose only purpose seems to be self-perpetuation, will strike many people as familiar." She only chides Havel's play by saying it "can be verbose and over-intellectual." Lucy Hughes-Hallet of Plays & Players makes a point similar to Hemming's. She writes, "The plot is circular, or rather caucus race-shaped, in that everyone ends up exactly where they started in the hierarchy of the firm, but the Ptydepe affair shakes things up enough to reveal both the funny and the sinister side of excessive bureaucracy."

Criticism

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

Critical Essay #1

Annette Petruso is a freelance author and screenwriter in Austin, TX. In the following essay, Petruso considers the odd ending to The Memorandum, *discussing critical interpretations and giving an in-depth analysis of the characters involved.*

One element of Vaclav Havel's satirical absurdist play *The Memorandum* has been the subject of much critical discussion: the ending. Its tone does not seem to fit the rest of the play. At the end, Josef Gross the managing director whose effort to get a memorandum translated from Ptydepe is constantly stymied will not help Maria, the translation center secretary, get her job back. She is fired because she translated the document for him, though it was against the rules, and was caught by the staff watcher (office spy), George. Instead Gross sends her on her way with a long speech in which he basically tells her that he cannot risk his job by saving her's. He also tells her that she could easily get a job in the theater, one that she previously arranged for him. After a few compliments, Gross tells her that he must go to lunch. Collecting her things, Maria says "Nobody ever talked to me so nicely before."

Over the years, critics and scholars have had varying interpretations of this ending. Many saw it as a manifestation of Gross's inadequacies. In 1968, the unnamed critic in Time believed the events of the play had "so depersonalized" Gross that he could not risk helping her. The same year, Clive Barnes of the New York Times calls Gross "weak and vacillating," blaming him entirely for Maria's job loss. Scholar Robert Skloot also put the fault on Gross. In 1993, he wrote in the Kenyan Review that "That Maria remains 'happy' because 'nobody ever talked to me so nicely before' does not excuse Gross's avoidance of moral action nor his failure to reciprocate Maria's genuine expression of love toward him."

Others saw the ending as reflecting more on Maria and her qualities. In 1994, The Times' Jeremy Kingston believes that truth has not been served by the ending. He speculates that she might be happy because she is going to be part of the theater, like Havel was at the time, though there is no real indication that this job is even open to her. Scholar Jude R. Meche, writing in Modern Drama in 1997, believes that Maria emerges as the stronger character. "Maria's willingness to risk termination in translating the memorandum does nothing to condemn Gross; her willingness only testifies to her courage and sympathy for a fellow human being in need. Gross condemns himself ... [and] excus[es] himself from this debt with a wave of self-important rhetoric."

While all of these arguments have at least some validity, I believe the ending of The Memorandum is the most revealing moment of the play. It is the culmination of attitudes, subtly expressed through details and innuendoes that are often secondary to the main action. This essay looks in depth at the motivations, attitudes, and building of the characters of Gross and Maria, then at how the ending validates these characterizations.

As the New York Times' Barnes suggests, Gross shows himself to be a weak man, from the very beginning of The Memorandum. Admittedly, he is in a tough situation. Gross is the managing director of the unnamed organization, and his power does not seem that great. He is constantly undermined by his deputy director, Jan Ballas. It is Ballas who orders the introduction of the artificial language Ptydepe, demands that all the staff take classes in it, and moves the accounts department to the basement so a Ptydepe translation center can be set up in its place. Gross does not find this out from Ballas, but from Hana, his secretary. Gross even has to ask her, prompted by the receipt of a memorandum written in an unknown language. Everyone else in the organization has been informed about the introduction of Ptydepe. Gross always seems one step behind and rather dense.

Thus, even when Gross is managing director (the situation changes throughout the play, and he allows himself to be demoted to deputy director, loses his job, and then is rehired by Ballas as the office spy known as the staff watcher, promoted to deputy director again before reclaiming his original position), Ballas is firmly in control because he knows how to play on Gross's weaknesses. Ballas uses information he has on Gross to keep him in line and prod him into signing incriminating documents. Gross never tries to turn the tables on Ballas, but bows to his demands and cowers at every opportunity. Most revealing is a statement made by Gross in scene 1. He tells Ballas, and his ever-present silent companion and coconspirator Mr. Pillar, that "I don't mind taking risks, but I'm not a gambler."

Gross's only possible weapon against Ballas is the memorandum in Ptydepe. But the tangled, contradictory bureaucracy works against him as he tries to get it translated. Those who are in charge at the translation center Dr. Alex Savant, a supposed expert in Ptydepe; Otto Stroll, the department head; and Helena, its chairman follow the arcane rules that make it nearly impossible for Gross to get his memorandum put into vernacular. They also treat Gross with disrespect. Though he is the managing director, then deputy director, they walk in and out of the room and worry about food-related issues during scenes three and six, not finishing their explanations about why they cannot help him. These three from the translation center definitely respect Ballas, however. When Gross becomes completely frustrated with them and verbally berates them in scene six, they will not sit down when he orders them to because Ballas and Pillar are in the room behind him. Only when Ballas tells them to sit down, do they do so.

The only person in the whole organization who seems to have any real respect for Gross is Maria. She gets little herself. Maria, the translation center secretary, is treated like a slave and an object by her three immediate superiors. As Lucy Hughs-Hallet of *Plays [and] Players* points out, Maria is "the only character in this whole play about work who is ever actually seen to do any work (and even then her job consists mainly of doing her superiors' shopping)." From her first introduction in scene three, she is constantly doing their bidding running to the store for onions, cantaloupes, milk, limes, chocolate and coffee; ironing Helena's slip; and so on as well as typing reports and doing other typical secretarial work. Stoll and Savant also objectify her. When she

leaves on an errand, Savant says to Stroll "Sexy little thing, isn't she?" Maria does not seem bitter or angry by this treatment. She does her job more than adequately.

Into this world comes Gross. Maria is never seen outside of the translation center; Gross always comes to her. From the beginning, Gross tries to take advantage of her. There is a box of cigars in her work area that belongs to Stroll. She will not give him one because they are counted and she would get in trouble. This angers him slightly. At the end of the same scene, Gross tries to get Maria to translate *the memorandum* for him. Again, she says she must follow the rules and cannot. Gross tries to flatter her into doing what he wants. He says her name is "pretty" then presses her to translate it again. She declines again. Maria is a nice, polite person, but her continued employment is obviously of value to her.

By scene six, Gross's supposed affections for Maria have been noticed. Savant and Stroll tease him for calling her "sweetheart," as the staff watcher George has told them. Gross continues to be humiliated by these supposed inferiors, as Maria is kept running around by them. But Maria witnesses the moment at the end of the scene when Ballas fires Gross. Her fundamental goodness kicks in and she finds a job for Gross outside the organization in her brother's theater group. But Gross is rehired by Ballas as staff watcher in the face of a mutiny against him by Pillar. In scene nine, Gross continues to compliment her, calling her "kind" and complimenting her new hat. By the end of the scene, Gross has been promoted back to deputy director, and invites her to visit him in his office some time.

It is at this moment that Maria finally reveals her hand. Gross is about to leave, and Maria holds on to him for a few last moments. Maria says that "I believe that if one doesn't give way, truth must always come out in the end." He admits his faults "always hesitant, always full of doubts" among others, and promises to do better as a person. He will do "real deeds" and speak "fewer clever words." Gross's supposed honesty compels Maria to offer to break the rules for him: she will translate it. The memorandum supports the position he has had all along about Ptydepe, supporting him by saying that "you have been conscientious and responsible in the directing of your organization" and giving him their "full confidence." Before Maria admits her feelings for him, Gross says to her "I promise you that this time I shall not give way to anything or anybody, even at the risk of my position." After Gross leaves, however, George tells her that he heard her break the rules.

By the end of the play, nothing has really changed for Gross. All his "moral" words and empty rhetoric return him to the status quo at the beginning of the play. He is still merely the managing director at the mercy of Ballas. In scene ten, the moment when Gross should triumph, he cannot even get Ballas fired. Ballas turns the tables on him yet again. Another artificial language, Chorukor, is also being introduced. In scene 12, the last scene of the play, Maria asks Gross to intercede on her behalf because Ballas has fired her for translating the memo. Maria has asked nothing from anyone over the course of *The Memorandum.* She has done her job and even helped Gross. Her actions led to Gross regaining the managing directorship.

Gross refuses to reverse the decision, citing his conflict with Ballas among the reasons why he cannot save her job. This is in direct contrast to what he has declared moments before. From the beginning, Gross has proved weak and ineffectual, and it results in Maria losing her livelihood. Gross tries to sweeten the moment by reminding her that she is still young and that she could work for her brother in his theater group. He tells her that she should still "trust in people" and "keep smiling!" The final insult is when Gross excuses himself from the room by saying he has to eat lunch. Throughout the play, everyone has been treating him with disrespect by putting food, drink, and smokes, before him, and he does the same thing to Maria. She is the only person he has any real power over.

Maria's line ("Nobody ever talked to me so nicely before.") and her happy exit are both ironic and honest. She really has not been treated so well before. Gross actually paid attention to her, took a few moments to talk to her when no one else did, even if it was with a secondary agenda on his part. Gross's lack of intervention also means that Maria is free of this bureaucratic hell. *The Times'* Kingston and Gross seem to believe that she can now work with her brother's theater group though if she had wanted to do that, it seems she would already be working there. Gross's weakness is his greatest strength for Maria at the end. He let his savior martyr herself for him, and Maria has been liberated. She has options in life no one in that organization seems to have. But, knowing the fickle nature of those employed in The Memorandum, Maria could still return to her job. It does not seem clear how any of them could live without her because no one else does any work. At least Maria is free for the moment, a moment longer than the rest of them.

Source: *Annette Petruso, in an essay for Drama for Students, Gale, 2001.*

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Baranczak discusses the various character techniques used throughout The Memorandum.

"SIX ONE-ACT PLAYS BY SIX WORLD LEADERS " was what a recent *New Yorker* cartoon envisaged as a canopy advertisement above the door to an off-Broadway theater. The wit is in the arithmetic. The number six suspends the joke precisely between the actual state of affairs and the realm of the improbable. Had the sign said, "TWO ONE-ACT PLAYS BY TWO WORLD LEADERS," we would not laugh, because the estimate would be too realistic. Had it said "TEN ONE-ACT PLAYS BY TEN WORLD LEADERS," we would not laugh, because the estimate would be too fantastic. But six, why not?

Not long ago, there was just one world leader whose resume included a few plays actually written by him and performed on stage (though their production anywhere near Broadway seems a rather remote possibility). Now there are two: the pope has been joined by the president of Czechoslovakia. Who's next? Hasn't a recent article published in a Solidarity newspaper proposed Leszek Kolakowski for the presidency of Poland? Kolakowski, let's not forget, is the author not just of works of philosophy, but also of a comedy he wrote in his spare time. The trend seems to be on the rise. You don't have to be royalty to collect royalties; being the president of a small nation will suffice.

Our amusement at the sight of a playwright becoming his country's president speaks volumes about the declining standards in the West's political life. What's so strange about the election of an outstanding writer from Bohemia? Is it any more consistent with the natural order of things if a much less outstanding golf player from Indiana gets elected to do the same? Weren't Lincoln and Churchill gifted writers? Wouldn't we all be slightly better off if our leaders knew how to select a proper word, put together a precise sentence, plant a stirring idea in a well-constructed paragraph?

Admittedly, even though there might be some truth in the tired Shelley line (you know, the one about poets being the unacknowledged legislators of the world), things get a little complicated when a poet, or a playwright, becomes acknowledged as a legislator, a minister, or a president. First of all, the sort of parliament or government he serves is not entirely inconsequential. The sad case of the talented poet Ernesto Cardenal, who lent support to Daniel Ortega's regime by accepting the position of its minister of culture, is just one example of the incompatibility between literature's natural thirst for freedom and despotism's natural desire to suppress freedom. That is a conflict in which something has to give, and all too often it has been the writer's conscience that has given.

Moreover, history provides us with a hair-raising number of examples of humanity's worst enemies, from Nero to Hitler, Goebbels, Stalin, and Mao, who considered themselves, at least before their ascent to power but sometimes also a long time after it, artists or writers. A failed artist or a graphomaniac seems to be particularly good

material for the making of a ruthless oppressor; he need only apply his crude aesthetic principle of mechanical symmetry to the unruly and formless human mass.

And even if the political system is a democratic one, and the "acknowledged legislator" or leader happens to be an artist or a writer wise enough to be profoundly aware of human diversity, his success in the world of politics is far from assured. As a writer, his chief strength the force that made him a legislator, "however unacknowledged," in the first place was his steadfast rejection of compromise. As a politician, however, he soon finds out that politics in a democratic society is nothing but the art of compromise.

If it so happened one day that destiny wanted the first president of post-Communist Czechoslovakia to be a writer, what kind of writer should he ideally be? Let us imagine a group of Czechoslovak citizens gathered secretly in a private apartment in the middle of 1989, taking refuge from their depressing reality by discussing this preposterous question, a question as thoroughly outlandish to them as the seashore that Shakespeare gave Bohemia in *A Winter's Tale*. Any answer would certainly have included the reverse of the qualities we have just mentioned.

First, the literary president should be a writer with an extraordinarily strong moral backbone, someone whose life, like his work, has been dedicated to searching for the untraversable borderline between good and evil; someone, therefore, who would be able to bring the spirit of ethics into his country's national and international politics. Second, the literary president should be a good writer, endowed with the sense of measure and balance that in the sphere of aesthetics is called good taste or artistic skill, and in the sphere of politics translates into a pluralistic tolerance for the natural diversity of people and their opinions. A playwright someone who shows the world through dialogue would be a particularly well-qualified candidate: the spectacle of conflicting human perspectives forms the lifeblood of his art.

And third, the literary president should be a writer blessed with a tremendous sense of humor, preferably of the self-mocking, ironic, absurdist sort. For it is only with such a sense of humor that a writer-turned-president would be able to think seriously of making his nation ascend from the depths of the totalitarian absurd toward a more or less rational social organization, while at the same time never taking himself and the miracle of his own ascension too seriously. In short, the ideal president of Czechoslovakia that our depressed friends would have likely dreamed up is this: a genuinely good playwright with a genuinely strong set of moral convictions balanced by a genuine sense of pluralistic tolerance and a genuine sense of humor.

In the middle of 1989, there happened to be one living and breathing candidate who matched this impossibly exacting description. His name was Vaclav Havel.

The real test of a man is not how well he plays the role he has invented for himself, but how well he plays the role that destiny assigned to him." This is how Havel himself, quoting the dictum of his friend and mentor, the late philosopher Jan Patocka, reflects on all the twists of fate that made him first Czechoslovakia's most vilified dissident and then its most venerated president. The issue of the "role" (a fitting term in the mouth of a

playwright) is crucial in Havel's philosophical system. What he means by that is the responsibility that man, "thrown into the world," accepts by relating his life to the Absolute Horizon of transcendence (which is defined by Havel, who is reluctant to resort to the vocabulary of theology, as the "Memory of Being").

This kind of outlook, in Havel's case, owes as much to the inspiration drawn from the works of existentialists andphenomenologists as to the inspiration provided by life. Letters to Olga, Havel's most detailed and extensive exposition of his philosophy of existence, was written, symbolically enough, in a prison cell a place to which his "role" consistently led him. It was a place that he converted, ironically, into a stage on which to play, even more eloquently, the same role he had played outside the prison walls. Letters to Olga focused on the final outcome of a life, on its complete philosophy. The life that produced this outcome has now, in turn, become the focus of *Disturbing the Peace*, a highly engaging autobiographical sketch in the form of a book-length interview. This much-needed book explains how the events of the unbelievable fall of 1989 can be seen as an almost inevitable phase in Havel's lifelong "role," which was both "assigned to him" by destiny and "invented" by himself.

The facts of Havel's life were more or less known in the West even before 1989, mostly thanks to the publicity generated by his trials and his prison sentences. Havel's life was marked by absurd paradoxes early. Born in 1936 into the wealthy family of a civil engineer, he was suddenly a social pariah the child of a class enemy in 1948, when Czechoslovakia turned Communist. He was denied access to a higher education, worked for a while as a laboratory technician, and went through a two-year military service. Throughout that ordeal, he wrote (his first article was published in 1955), and made his presence known in public appearances, such as his speech at an official symposium of young writers in 1956, shockingly critical of the official hierarchy of literary values.

From 1959 on, his life was inextricably linked to theater. He joined Prague's unorthodox Theater on the Balustrade, initially as a stage hand, and ended up as its literary adviser. Garden Party, his first play, premiered in 1963. In 1965 he joined the editorial staff of the monthly Tvar, a tribune of rebellious young writers.

Those were heady times of growing ferment and hope, but change was yet to come. Tvar was soon closed down by its own editors, unable to continue publishing under the watchful eye of the Party. Between 1956 and 1968, Havel used consecutive congresses of the Czechoslovak Writers' Association as forums for his increasingly critical speeches, but his ideas were staunchly resisted by the well-entrenched camp of Communist writers. In March 1968 he helped establish the Circle of Independent Writers, thus creating a cultural alternative of major importance. Meanwhile his next plays had their Czech and Western premieres, and his name became internationally known.

Havel became even better known after the Prague Spring and the Soviet invasion, when he emerged one of the most eloquent champions of human rights in Husak's police state. His participation in actions of protest and his own analyses of the social

apathy induced by Brezhnev's Czechoslovak puppets (such as his famous "Letter to Dr. Gustav Husak," which was written in 1975) brought down on him increasingly vicious personal attacks in the official media as well as unrelenting police harassment. On January 1, 1977, Havel joined Patocka and Jiri Hajek as a spokesman for the Charter 77 movement. The rest is a story of interrogations, investigations, detentions, provocations, searches, house arrests, buggings, prosecutor's charges, trials, jail sentences, labor camps, prison hospitals, and, amid all this turmoil, more writing.

As we all know, this particular story has a happy ending, the impeccable symmetry of which the nation's most persecuted writer turns overnight into the nation's president looks downright suspicious. Were Havel's life a novel, it might be the most naive piece of literary kitsch in the twentieth century. A clear-headed observer of the world's ways knows that there is no such neat example of virtue miraculously rewarded in real life. Is Havel's life a fairy tale, a dream? The honest and the brave, after all, are supposed to get beaten to death by unknown assailants, to disappear without trace, to be found in the trunk of an abandoned car with bullets in their heads. Havel's triumph is so unequivocally well deserved that it looks utterly outlandish.

And no wonder: this particular writer, again, is a walking paradox. This is true not merely of the course of his life, but also of his inner nature. Havel's role seems to have been delineated from the very beginning of his public and literary activity by his mind's preoccupation with two seemingly incompatible inclinations. His works and his actions reflect, on the one hand, a strong sense of moral order and of the need for justice, and on the other, a good-natured tolerance mixed with an absurd, zany sense of humor. An episode mentioned in Disturbing the Peace nicely illustrates the constant coexistence of these two inclinations. At one point early in Husak' s rule, Havel took part in a general assembly of the governing boards of the unions of writers and artists, which feared not without foundation, it soon turned out that their forcible dissolution was imminent. Havel was included in a three-member committee charged with drafting a strong statement to protest, and to try to deflect, the blow:

Unfortunately, I was also expected to participate in the opening of a show of paintings by a friend of mine in the Spalena Gallery, on Spalena Street, not far away. I wasn't going to give a serious speech there were art historians for that just take part in a little program of verses and songs. This was the dadaist wish of my friend, who loved the way I sang patriotic songs out of tune and gave impassioned recitations from our national literary classics at parties. And so, pretending that I had to go to the bathroom, I fled from the task of writing the historic manifesto and I ran to the gallery opening, where I sang and recited to a shocked audience, then rushed back to the film club to write the final paragraph.

Havel proceeds to note "something symbolic in this accidental juxtaposition." It illustrates, he suggests, certain fusions of a more general scope: the way the Czechs' sense and more generally, the Central Europeans' sense of misery about their existence is wed to a "sense of irony and self-deprecation." "Don't these two things somehow belong essentially together?" asks Havel. "Don't they condition each other?" The Central European writer's taste for the absurd, for dark humor, produces in him the

saving art of maintaining constant distance" from the world while never completely disengaging from it. Paradoxically, it is exactly the art of distance that allows you to see your subject from up close. As Havel puts it, "The outlines of genuine meaning can only be perceive bottom of absurdity."

In truth, the episode says more about Havel himself than about Central European culture. The distinguishing feature of his life and his art seems to be the nearly perfect balance between the seriousness of his moral imperatives and the boundlessness of his self-irony. That irony is not just his mind's innate inclination. It also stems from his recognition that his own vision of the truth no matter how scrupulously precise he tries to make it, no matter how much he is himself sure of its accuracy is still only one of many individual human truths.

It is by now quite obvious how much this balance of moral strength without fanaticism and pluralistic tolerance without relativism has affected Havel's progress along his political path. It is perhaps less clear how this same balance is reflected in his art. There just as in Havel's politics, the equilibrium of opposites keeps the forces in check, so that the extreme manifestations of each can cancel the other out.

An artist of Havel's sort is truly himself when he submits to his moral impulses, when his work originates from his fundamental objection to the world's injustice. But if that were all it took, the art might easily lapse into dogmatic and self-righteous didacticism, the work would be noble yet tedious moral instruction. Another condition, clearly, must be met. In the arts, the moralist needs to have a sense of humor.

This is not as easy as it sounds. A sense of humor is shorthand for many abilities, from the power to understand others' positions and motivations to the willingness to take oneself with a grain of salt. Only this kind of humor can save the artist from the chronic stiffness of his moral backbone, a disease that is quite common among artists in oppressed societies. It is a disease with which you can live, but not, for instance, dance: you can hold yourself impressively erect, but be too rigid for unrestrained expression. Of course, if the backbone suffers from permanent softening (an even more common affliction), if all that remains is the relativism and the absurdist sense of humor, the effects are even more frightening: when left to himself and to his choreographies, the artist may display much flexibility, but also yield easily to the slightest pressure. That is why Havel the playwright cannot really be squeezed into either of the two familiar drawers, "Theater of the Absurd" or "Protest Theater." He is too embedded in a stable bedrock of moral principles to fit into the first, and he is too irreverent and self-ironic to fit into the second. More precisely, his plays fall into two different categories, one stemming from the tradition of political theater, the other suggesting some superficial affinities with the Theater of the Absurd. The first category is represented by more or less realistic works such as the series of three one-act " Vanek plays," inaugurated in 1975 by the famed Audience. Largo Desolato, one of Havel's relatively recent creations, also belongs here. In plays of this sort, realism takes a deep whiff of grotesque exaggeration, but there is no doubt, particularly in the Vanek trilogy, that the action takes place in Husak's Czechoslovakia and that the characters' behavior is motivated by circumstances of that time and that place. (Unfortunately, the English version of Largo

Desolato, otherwise excellently done by Tom Stoppard, obliterates this Czechoslovakian specificity by Anglicizing the names.)

The other category, which includes *The Memorandum and Temptation*, is represented by plays, usually of greater length and based on more developed plots, that are parabolic rather than realistic. Sometimes they border on anti-utopian fantasy. Instead of a realistic setting, the typical drama revolves around a fictitious institution such as the Orwellian office in *The Memorandum*, complete with watchmen hidden in the hollow walls to keep an eye on employees through special cracks, and the scientific institute at war with society's "irrational tendencies" in Temptation. What goes beyond realism, actually, is not so much the setting as the plot's starting device: the introduction of Ptydepe, the artificial language for interoffice communication, in *The Memorandum* and the bureaucratic forms of idolatry of rational science" that produce the Faustian rebellion of the protagonist in *Temptation.*

The difference between Havel's two types of plays, however, is one of degree. Both deal with essentially the same issues; the parabolic differs from the realistic perhaps only in that the grotesque and the absurd are turned up a notch. But the grotesque and the absurd are intrinsically present even in the most "realistic" of Havel'splays. In the strictly realistic *Audience*, a play that utilizes Havel's own firsthand experience of work at the Trutnov brewery, a socialist workplace that re-educates its employees by making them submit regular reports on themselves to the secret police cannot help but seem like a profoundly aberrant institution. And it is no less so than the imaginary office in *The Memorandum* that forces its employees to learn a special language, one that would help them produce more precise memos if its utter precision not make it impossible to use. The only difference is that Audience could really have happened in Husak's Czechoslovakia, while something not so blatantly idiotic as *The Messenger*, but something similar in spirit, could perhaps have happened there.

Another striking similarity between Havel's "realistic" and "parabolic" plays lies in their protagonists, fact, it would only be a slight oversimplification to say that whatever sort of play Havel writes, a single protagonist by the name of Ferdinand Vanek always pops up at the center of its plot. The now legendary figure of Vanek appeared first in Audience (to my mind, still the most perfectly executed accomplishment of Havel's wit), to reappear in his next two one-act plays, *Unveiling* and *Protest*. At the same time, the underground success of Audience gave rise to a one-of-a-kind literary phenomenon: a constellation of plays employing the same protagonist but written by different authors. ("The Vanek plays" in that broader sense include pieces written by Pavel Kohout, Payel Landorsky, and Jiri Dienstbier, and they are all reprinted in UBC Press's handy collection.) But Leopold Nettles of Largo Desolato is also, to a large extent, another incarnation of Vanek, and Vanek-like characters spur the dramatic action in Havel's "parabolic" plays as well.

What these characters share is a position in society. All of them can be roughly defined as dissidents in a totalitarian state, or at least (as in the cases of Josef Gross in *The Memorandum* and Dr. Foustka in *Temptation*) jammed cogwheels in the otherwise smoothly functioning machine of a powerful institution. This position entails a number of

consequences. The most crucial is that the Vanek-like character represents, obviously, a political and moral minority. He is one of the last Mohicans of common sense, truthfulness, and human decency in a society that has laboriously adopted, in lieu of those simple principles, a Darwinian methodology of survival. Blind obedience to authority, thoughtless concentration on necessities of everyday life, and deep-seated distrust of any protester or reformer are the chief precepts of this methodology. Thus Vanek is by no means a valiant knight in shining armor or a modern Robin Hood whom the wretched of the earth look up to. Despite all the words of cautious support and solidarity that some of his acquaintances occasionally dare whisper into his ear, Vanek is hated and despised. Hated, because he is "disturbing the peace" of pacified minds; despised, because he is cannot help being a loser. The forces that he opposes are too powerful; he will certainly be crushed in the foreseeable future.

Hence the central paradox of Havel's literary universe: it is not Vanek who, from the heights of his moral purity as a fighter for human rights, accuses the corrupt society of indifference; it is his society that accuses Vanek of the same yes, of indifference. In the eyes of a citizen whose main concerns are promotion at his workplace, getting his daughter into a university, and building himself a dacha in the country, Vanek looks like a dangerous instigator and rabblerouser. What the Brewmaster in *Audienc*e says to his face would be echoed with equal sincerity by other characters in other plays, had their tongues been similarly loosened by the heavy intake of beer: "Principles! Principles! Damn right you gonna fight for your damn principles but what about me? I only get my ass busted for having principles!" Vanek's original sin, all of them seem to think, is his indifference to other people, an attitude that he demonstrates merely by living among them and irritating them with his inflated conscience. He can afford to stick his neck out; we can't.

In specific plays, this reverberating "He can, we can't" is wrapped in different words, depending on the accuser's social status, intellectual acumen, and degree of cowardice. The Brewmaster's argument runs along the lines of social division: you can, but I can't, because I'm a simple worker whom nobody will care to defend and whose protest will go unheard anyway. In *Unveiling*, a married couple of friends who invited Vanek for the "unveiling" of their newly decorated apartment resort to an argument that reflects their philosophy of life: you can, but we can't, because we need to live our lives to the full, while the pleasures of life apparently do not matter much to you. In *Protest*, a well-to-do screenwriter wriggles out of a moral obligation to sign a petition in defense of an imprisoned artist by invoking sophisticated arguments related to political tactics (he ends up endorsing "the more beneficial effect which the protest would have without my signature"), which essentially come down to the following: you can, but I can't, because your career has gone to the dogs anyway, while mine is still something I have to take care of.

These are all voices of human normalcy. Havel the pluralist has no choice but to register them, and even partly to agree with them. But Havel the moralist counters with a more powerful argument of his own: that in a totalitarian society it is precisely the "abnormal" troublemakers who have preserved the last vestiges of normalcy. Theirs is the ordinary human striving for freedom and dignity, the kind that ultimately matters more than the

misleading normalcy of a full stomach. And Havel the self-ironist acknowledges, and brings into dramatic relief, the intrinsic irony of the dissidents' position: they may well be the only normal human beings around, but since they constitute a ridiculously powerless minority, their cause, noble though it is, will always be doomed to defeat.

In Havel's plays, Vanek serves as the central point around which these three lines of argument interlock, forming a triangular trap with no way out. He has no choice but to admit that people have basic rights to food on their tables and to a TV show after dinner. He realizes that his actions make people uneasy or put them at a risk. At the same time, he has no choice; he must stick to his own basic right to follow the voice of his conscience. That is not because of moral haughtiness, but for the simple reason that he is unable to force himself to do things or utter words that he considers wrong or false. In a sense, he lives among his compatriots like a foreigner in Paris: he is aware that all the French eat escargots, and he is even able to grasp abstractly their reasons for doing so, but he is physically incapable of forcing the slimy invertebrates down his throat. Finally Vanek has no choice but to realize his own comical awkwardness. In a society like his, he will always be the odd man out, a laughable exception to the prevailing rule.

The combination of these three necessities makes Vanek a highly complex dramatic character. This is clear even in the Vanek trilogy, in which Havel's protagonist is, in terms of sheer stage presence, the least exposed among all the characters. He might seem like little more than a taciturn straight man opposite his rambling and dramatically more developed counterparts. Yet his psychological profile would fill volumes. He is, oddly yet convincingly, heroic and anti-heroic, a centerpiece of tragedy as well as farce. He is never so blindly self-righteous as to forget that, after all, he shares with people their trivial needs, that therefore he is one of them. If his moral backbone is a little more erect than most people's, it is also a backbone that aches.

Vanek, in sum, is not comfortable with his nagging conscience, and he is not terribly proud of it, either. He realizes how little separates him from the less heroic human mass. In Audience, Vanek, apparently blacklisted, barred from any white-collar job, and forced to take up physical labor in a provincial brewery, does not wish at all to be a martyr; and it is this reluctance that motivates the entire plot. He would gladly swallow the bait of the less exhausting clerical position that the Brewmaster dangles in front of him, even at the cost of the fellow worker whom he would replace. The only reason that he rejects the offer is that the torture of toiling in the brewery's cold cellar is ultimately more bearable than the torture of the nonsensical informing on himself, which the Brewmaster requires as part of the deal.

In *Largo Desolato*, Havel's tendency to endow his dissident hero with anti-heroic features reaches an even greater extreme. Leopold Nettles is a dissident malgre lui, one who is not only aware of his weaknesses, like Vanek, but also doubtful about whether he is up to the task at all. He did not really become a dissident; he was made one. Some of his philosophical writings were denounced by the regime as ideologically harmful, and his quiet life of an introspective bookworm was irrevocably changed. We see him at the point of total exhaustion, on the verge of a nervous breakdown.

Ironically, his new status as a dissident has deprived him of his previous independence. Now everyone, his supporters and persecutors alike, expects something from him. His apartment is visited by an unending stream of friends who worry about his doing nothing, friends who worry about his not doing enough, friends who worry about his doing too much, friends who worry about his worrying. While expecting a secret police search and arrest any minute, he has to entertain his far-from-satis-fied lover and at the same time handle a visit from a pair of suspiciously enthusiastic working-class supporters who bear the unmistakable signs of agents provocateurs.

When the police finally turn up, their only demand is that Nettles renounce the authorship of his paper. When he refuses, the final blow falls: the police declare that his case has been adjourned "indefinitely for the time being," since it has become clear that his denial of his own identity "would be superfluous." Nettles cries, "Are you trying to say that I am no longer me?" The words aptly sum up what has happened to him. His self has been transformed into (to use the word Havel has applied elsewhere to his own life) a role. A role, in this case, definitely "assigned to him by destiny" rather than "invented by himself," but a role that he has been unable to "play well."

To what extent does Nettles personify the playwright's own doubts? Just as Havel the president is not a man of marble, Havel the dissident was not a man of iron. He has had his crises, his failures, his moments of despair. Largo Desolato was written in four days in July 1984, precisely at the low point of a bout of acute "postprison despair." Yet in Disturbing the Peace Havel plays down the autobiographical import of his play: "It is not about me, or only about me as such. The play has ambitions to be a human parable, and in that sense it's about man in general."

For Havel, though, writing about "man in general" means distilling some abstract concept of humanity out of concrete and individual experience. On the contrary, it means portraying man in his concrete surroundings, in the web of his innumerable entanglements, from the metaphysical to the trivial. (*Temptation*, with its Mephistopheles suffering from smelly feet, and its Faust immersed in the vulgarity of power games and sycophancy of his colleagues, is a particularly apt illustration of that range of vision.) Central among those entanglements is the individual's relationship to society and its institutions. In Havel, who is a matchless literary expert on the ironies of totalitarianism, this relationship takes on, as a rule, the shape of the most ironic of oppressions: the constant oppression of the individual by the institutions that he helped create.

Seen from this point of view, Havel's entire dramatic output may not seem to have progressed much beyond, say, lonesco' s *The Rhinoceros or The Bald Singer*. The similarities extend even to characteristic techniques in construing dialogue and dramatic situations. Not unlike lonesco, Havel's favorite device is mechanical repetition. His plays are organized masterfully, almost like musical pieces, around recurring, intercrossing, and clashing refrains, usually utterances from a small-talk phrase book; the more frequently repeated, the more meaningless they are. The Brewmaster's "Them's the paradoxes of life, right?" and similar verbal refrains find their counterparts in repetitive elements of stage action (for example, the way certain characters conspicuously hold hands in *Temptation).* The despotic oppression of language, custom, stereotype,

institution, any automatism with which man replaces the irregularity, spontaneity, and uniqueness of his self is a theme that runs through the Theater of the Absurd. Havel did not invent it, he merely transplanted the theme and its corresponding dramatic techniques onto the ground of the specific experience of the inhabitant of a Central European police state.

What he did invent was his counterbalance to the oppressive weight of that experience. That counterbalance is the weak, confused, laughable, and oddly heroic Vanek, in all his incarnations. Havel the moralist, Havel the pluralist, and Havel the ironist joined forces to produce a deeply human and exquisitely equivocal character. Precisely because Vanek is safe from the excesses of relativistic immoralism, he is able to help us put things in perspective. Precisely because he is safe from the excesses of dogmatic didacticism and self-righteous seriousness, he remains someone who teaches us something, who has to be taken seriously.

If he is an anti-heroic and comical version of Camus's Rebel, he is nonetheless a Rebel with a cause and a Rebel with no streak of single-minded obsessiveness. A Rebel essentially powerless, true; but Vanek's obstinate defense of the core of his humanity expresses something more essential than the need for power: the need for values. In Central Europe in the mid-1970s, it was enough to realize the genuine presence of this need in the human world to begin to believe that "the power of the powerless," prophesied rather than described by Havel in his epoch-making essay of 1978, may one day manifest itself in real life. Last year it did. People very much like Havel's protagonist have woken up the rest of their society and won their seemingly lost cause. The symbolic credit for today's Czechoslovakia is owed not to Svejk, the bumbling soldier and relativistic philosopher of compromise. It is owed to Vanek.

Source: *Stanislaw Baranczak, "The Memorandum: A Play," (review). The New Republic, Vol, 203, No. 4, July 23, 1990, p. 27.*

Critical Essay #3

In the following excerpt, Carey places Havel's drama in three major phases: "The early absurdist comedies; the Vanek morality plays; and the psychological-prison plays."

If the language games of *The Garden Party* relativize the human out of the equation, the use of a synthetic language *Ptydepe* enables Havel in The *Memorandum* (1965), winner of the Obie Award (1967-68) for best foreign play, to focus on the process by which humans abdicate their humanity to linguistic and/or political systems.

Josef Gross, the Managing Director of an anonymous bureaucracy, receives a memorandum in *Ptydepe,* an artificial language designed to make human communication scientifically precise by making words as dissimilar as possible. In his attempts to get the memo translated, Gross experiences the paradoxes of bureaucracy: he can obtain the documents he needs to authorize the translation only by having the memorandum already translated. While he struggles with the irrationality of the system, he falls victim to a subordinate's power play, is demoted, but eventually convinces Maria, a secretary, to translate his memo; the message, ironically, confirms in Ptydepe the inadequacy of the new language, urging its liquidation. The play ends with Gross back in charge and with the prospect of a new synthetic language *Chorukor* which will operate on linguistic principles of similarity.

In *The Memorandum* Havel explores the scientific effort to transform language into a technological tool. Here, the drive for scientific precision contends with the apparently human need for unpredictability. The language instructor's lesson on saying "boo" in *Ptydepe* illustrates how analysis increasingly deadens spontaneity: The decision as to which *Ptydepe* expression to use for "boo" depends on the rank of the person speaking and whether the "boo" is anticipated, a surprise, a joke, or a test, as in "*Yxap tseror najx.*" Another hilarious example of a simple expression made as complex as possible is the word "Hurrah!," which in *Ptydepe* becomes "*frnygko jefr dabux altep dy savarub goz texeres*."

The precision exercised on analyzing the trivial contrasts with the imprecision in expressing what may be humanly significant. The ambiguous term "whatever," deemed the most used human expression, is rendered by the shortest *Ptydepe* word, "*gh*." Ironically, beneath all of the scientific pretensions, body language communicates and carries much of the action.

The preoccupation with using an artificial language in *The Memorandum* draws attention to the technological propensity to focus on means instead of ends. Enormous efforts to communicate precisely are undercut by the banality of what is expressed. Knowing the system, however, enables one to participate in the illusion of power and control. Like the specialized jargon of most professionals, *Ptydepe* represents an elitist code that paradoxically limits human communication both to a small group of cognoscenti and to those issues that can be analyzed and labeled.

Gross is caught between the need to fit into the system and his own humanistic platitudes. When Maria, fired because she translated the message without authorization, asks for his help, Gross excuses himself on the grounds that he cannot compromise his position as the "last remains of Man's humanity" within the system. He moves Hamlet's dilemma into *Camus*' theory of the absurd, and as so often in a scientific age, the descriptive becomes the normative:

Like Sisyphus, we roll the boulder of our life up the hill of its illusory meaning, only for it to roll down again into the valley of its own absurdity.... Manipulated, absurdity ... automatized, made into a fetish, Man loses the experience of his own totality; horrified, he stares as a stranger at himself, unable not to be what he is not, nor to be what he is.

Gross, the would-be existentialist who is always wishing he could start his life over, cannot translate his own language into responsible action. If Pudnik is entangled in language games devoid of human integrity, Gross demonstrates that when language becomes an end in itself, even the most accurate or the most eloquent expressions become impotent.

In the tradition of Kafka, Camus, and Beckett, probably his most significant mentors, Havel explores in *The Garden Party and The Memorandum* the paradox of human rationality pushed to its absurd logical extreme. As in Kafka, anonymous authority figures loom behind the absurd context; as in Beckett, the habits and rituals of daily existence frequently deaden people from the horror of their predicament; as in Camus, there is occasional recognition of the absurdity. But Havel's characters, unlike those of Camus, do not rebel; rather they adapt and use the absurdity as an excuse for their own inhumanity.

Source: Phyllis Carey, "Living in Lies: Vaclev Havel's Drama," in Cross Currents, Vol. 42, No. 2, Summer, 1990, pp. 200-11.

Topics for Further Study

Research how artificial languages are created and function. Discuss *Ptydepe,* the artificial language in *The Memorandum*, in these terms.

Research the economic implications of Soviet-style communism on Eastern Europe. Why did this economic system create such an expansive bureaucracy? What were the psychological effects on the people who worked?

Research the ideas behind the Theater of the Absurd, perhaps through the writings of Albert Camus or Martin *Esslin*. Is *The Memorandum* a true example of Absurdist theater? Discus your theory in detail.

Compare and contrast Maria, the secretary in *The Memorandum* with her counterpart in Havel's earlier play, *The Garden Party*. How does Havel depict these women? How do they react to their similar situations?

Compare and Contrast

1965: Czechoslovakia is a whole country, as it has been for most of the time since its creation in 1918.

Today: The country has been split in two for many years. The rise of Slovak nationalism after the Velvet Revolution led to the creation of two new countries: Slovakia and the Czech Republic.

1965: Czechoslovakia is a communist country, controlled by the Soviet Union as part of the Warsaw Pact.

Today: The Czech Republic and Slovakia are free, independent nations. Havel is the president of the Czech Republic, as he has been since 1993. Previously, he was president of Czechoslovakia from 1989 to 1992. Havel was the first noncommunist president since the 1940s.

1965: Under the Soviet economic model, everyone has a job, but the standard of living is low in Czechoslovakia.

Today: Unemployment is higher, but the standard of living is also higher, in the new free market economy of the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

1965: Those in power, primarily the Communists, have restrictions on what can be written. Censorship, while not as harsh as at other times in Czechoslovakian history, still exists.

Today: There is no overt censorship on creative endeavors in the Czech Republic.

What Do I Read Next?

The Trial, a book by Franz Kafka, published in 1925. It also concerns the trials and tribulations of a man, Josef K., caught up in the system.

1984, a novel by George Orwell, published in 1949. The work describes a futuristic society in which everyone is monitored and controlled by an overwhelming bureaucracy.

Audience, a play by Havel written in 1975. It also concerns the oppression of bureaucracy.

Metamorphosis, a novel by Franz Kafka, published in 1915. This is a book that also focuses on a man trapped in an impossible situation.

Animal Farm: *A Fairy Story*, is a novella by George Orwell that was published in 1945. It also concerns bullying, structure, and power, and shares some repetitive qualities with *The Memorandum.*

Further Study

Carey, Phyllis, "Living in Lies: Vaclav Havel's Drama," in *Cross Currents*, Summer, 1990, pp. 200-11.

This essay gives an overview of Havel's work as a playwright, including a brief discussion of *The Memorandum.*

Goetz-Stankiewicz, Marketa, and Phyllis Carey, eds., *Critical Essays on Vaclav Havel,* G. K. Hall & Company, 1999.

This collection of essays covers all of Havel's writings as well as his political life. Several discussions of The Memorandum are included.

Hvizdala, Karel, and Vaclav Havel, *Disturbing the Peace*: A Conversation with *Karel Hvizdala*, translated by Paul Wilson, Alfred A. Knopf, 1990.

This book is composed of conversations between the authors in 1986, and includes Havel's own descriptions of his life and work.

Korbel, Josef, *Twentieth Century Czechoslovakia*: *The Meanings of Its History*, Columbia University Press, 1977.

This book gives background on the history of Czechoslovakia from its inception to 1968, with one chapter focusing on the era The Memorandum is set in.

Kriseova, Eda, Vaclav Havel: The Authorized Biography, translated by Caleb Crain, St. Martin's Press, 1993.

This biography covers the whole of *Havel's* life, including both his political and literary accomplishments.

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Oliver, Edith, "Hayf Dy Doretob!," in *New Yorker*, May 18, 1968, pp. 73-74.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

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

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

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

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

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

Selection Criteria

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

How Each Entry Is Organized

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

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

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

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

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

Other Features

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

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

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

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

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

Citing Drama for Students

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We Welcome Your Suggestions

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

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