All the Years of Her Life Study Guide

All the Years of Her Life by Morley Callaghan

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Introduction

"All the Years of Her Life" is a short story by Canadian writer Morley Callaghan. It was published in his second collection of short stories, Now *That April's Here and Other Stories* (New York, 1936). "All the Years of Her Life" is a straightforward story with only three characters, written in an economical, unpretentious style typical of Callaghan's work. A young man, Alfred Higgins, is caught by his employer, Sam Carr, pilfering items from the drugstore where he works. Instead of immediately calling the police, Mr. Carr sends for Alfred's mother. The story focuses on Mrs. Higgins's psychological state, which by the end of the story turns out to be quite different from how it first appears. When Alfred observes this change in his mother, he has a moment of insight in which he understands something about her he never before noticed. In just a few pages, Callaghan manages to tell a moving story of a mother's devotion to her wayward son and the son's sudden acquisition of a new maturity. The story ends on a note of quiet hope.

Author Biography

Edward Morley Callaghan was born February 22, 1903, in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. He was the second son of Thomas and Mary Callaghan and was raised in a middle-class home where literature was revered.

From 1921 to 1925, Callaghan attended St. Michael's College, University of Toronto, graduating with a bachelor of arts degree in 1925. During these years, he wrote his first fiction. He also took summer jobs at the weekly *Toronto Star,* where he became friends with Ernest Hemingway.

In 1925, Callaghan enrolled at Osgoode Hall Law School, graduating in 1928. He never practiced law, however, because by then he had published several stories and his first novel, *Strange Fugitive* (1928). This work was followed by a collection of short stories, *A Native Argosy* (1929).

In 1929, Callaghan married Loretto Florence Dee. They honeymooned in Paris, remaining there for seven months. The couple had two children together.

The early and mid-1930s were a prolific period for Callaghan. He wrote a novella, *No Man's Meat* (1931), and five novels: *It's Never Over* (1930), *A Broken Journey* (1932), *Such Is My Beloved* (1934), *They Shall Inherit the Earth* (1935), and *More Joy in Heaven* (1937). He also published a collection of short stories, *Now That April's Here and Other Stories* (1936), which contains the story "All the Years of Her Life."

In 1938, with his reputation growing and critics and readers praising his distinctive style, Callaghan's creativity dried up, and he stopped writing novels and short stories. He tried his hand at playwriting, but the two plays he wrote in 1938 had to wait a decade before being produced. He wrote little more until 1947. Instead, Callaghan took up other occupations. He was a sports columnist for *New World Illustrated;* he joined the staff of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) radio program *Things To Come;* and in 1947, he joined the panel of the CBC radio quiz show *Beat the Champs.* Callaghan also wrote a screenplay for the National Film Board of Canada.

Callaghan resumed writing short stories and novels in 1947. His novel *The Loved and the Lost* (1951) won the Governor General's Award for fiction. Four years later, Callaghan won the *Maclean's* magazine fiction prize for the novella *The Man with the Coat,* which Callaghan adapted into the novel *The Many Colored Coat (1960).*

In 1958, Callaghan covered the death of Pope Pius XII in Rome for the *Toronto Star* weekly magazine. This article formed the basis for his novel *A Passion in Rome* (1961). His third collection of short stories, *Morley Callaghan's Stories,* was published in 1959. In 1963, Callaghan published *That Summer in Paris: Memories of Tangled Friendships with Hemingway, Fitzgerald and Some Others,* a memoir of his relationship with Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald in the summer of 1929.

In his later years, Callaghan continued to write, publishing *A Fine and Private Place* (1975), *Close to the Sun Again* (1977), and *A Time for Judas* (1983). In 1982, Callaghan was appointed Companion of the Order of Canada. In 1983, he won the Author of the Year Award from the Canadian Booksellers Association. *A Wild Old Man on the Road* (1988) was his last novel. Callaghan died August 25, 1990, at the age of eighty-seven.

Plot Summary

"All the Years of Her Life" is set in a drugstore in an unnamed city that may well be New York. The story begins one evening in late summer when Alfred Higgins, who works in the drugstore, is putting on his coat, ready to go home. The owner of the drugstore, Sam Carr, says he wants to have a word with Alfred before he leaves.

Alfred knows something is wrong because of the tone of voice in which his employer speaks. His heart begins to beat fast. Mr. Carr asks him to remove some items from his pocket, including lipstick and toothpaste.

Red-faced, Alfred tries to protest. Then he grows frightened and does not know what to say. He removes the items from his pocket. Mr. Carr asks him how long he has been stealing from the store, and Alfred says he has never done it before. But Mr. Carr knows Alfred is lying. Alfred is always getting into trouble at work, and he cannot hold a job.

Mr. Carr reproaches Alfred, saying he had been willing to trust him. He does not immediately want to call the police. He indicates he will call Alfred's father, but Alfred says his father is not at home. Over Alfred's protests, Mr. Carr decides to call Alfred's mother instead. He explains to her that Alfred is in trouble and asks her to come to the store.

They wait in silence until Mrs. Higgins, Alfred's mother, arrives. Mr. Carr explains that Alfred has been pilfering small items from the store. Mrs. Higgins asks her son whether the accusation is true, and he admits that it is. The only explanation he can give for what he has done is that he has been spending money with his friends.

Mrs. Higgins turns to Mr. Carr and speaks with a simple earnestness. After Mr. Carr explains that he intends to call the police, Mrs. Higgins gently says she thinks a little good advice is what her son most needs. Alfred is surprised by how calm and composed his mother sounds, and he senses she has made a favorable impression on his employer.

After Alfred's mother has spoken, Mr. Carr says he does not want to be harsh, and offers simply to fire Alfred and not take the matter any further. Mrs. Higgins says she will never forget his kindness. She and Mr. Carr part on warm terms.

As mother and son walk home together, Alfred is afraid to speak. He is relieved to have escaped so lightly, but he wonders what his mother is thinking. When he finally speaks, he promises not to get into such a situation again. His mother responds angrily, saying he has disgraced her again. She tells him to keep quiet.

When they arrive home, his mother reproaches him again. She tells him to go to bed and never mention the incident to his father.

While he is undressing in his bedroom, Alfred hears his mother moving around in the kitchen. She is making a cup of tea. He feels a kind of wonder and admiration for her strength. Then he goes to the kitchen, and at the door he sees her pouring a cup of tea. She is no longer the calm woman she was at the drugstore. Her face looks frightened, and her hand trembles as she pours the tea. She looks old.

Alfred realizes this is how it has been for his mother every time he has gotten into trouble. He now understands everything she may have been thinking when they walked home in silence. Just by looking at the way her hand trembles as she raises the cup to her lips, he thinks that he knows all she has experienced in her life. He feels that he is looking at her for the first time.

Summary

"All the Years of Her Life" is a short story about the love a mother has for her son. The son does not appreciate his mother until the night his actions cause her emotional collapse, as he realizes the depth of her affection.

As the story begins, Sam Carr, the owner of a drugstore, asks his young employee, Alfred Higgins, if there might be some items in his coat pockets that he wants to leave on the counter before he goes home for the evening. Alfred immediately senses that something is wrong because Mr. Carr's soft tone has replaced his usual gruff manner.

Mr. Carr contends that Alfred has taken two tubes of toothpaste, a compact and a lipstick, but Alfred denies stealing anything. Mr. Carr persists in his calm tone, and eventually Alfred produces the stolen items, laying them on the counter. Mr. Carr makes the assumption that this is not the first time that Alfred has stolen items, although Alfred denies any other thefts.

Alfred feels the old fear rising in him since he always has trouble holding onto a job, and he suspects that he is about to lose this one too. Alfred lives with his parents, as the last child to remain at home, after the marriages of his two older brothers and the recent surprise wedding of his younger sister. Alfred knows that his parents would have an easier life if he could keep a job.

Mr. Carr likes Alfred and wants to trust him, but this incident makes that impossible. Mr. Carr is conflicted about how to handle the situation. Not sure that Alfred should be arrested, Mr. Carr volunteers that he will call Alfred's father first instead of the police. Alfred says that his father works at night as a printer and will not be at home. The only other option is for Mr. Carr to call Alfred's mother, an idea to which Alfred objects. Mr. Carr places the call to Mrs. Higgins, explaining the unfortunate situation. Mr. Carr and Alfred wait in the uncomfortable, quiet darkness of the store for Alfred's mother to arrive.

Finally, Mrs. Higgins arrives clutching her coat at her neck, her hair roughly shoved up under her hat. Mrs. Higgins bears an elegant composure in spite of the circumstances and acknowledges the charges from Mr. Carr. Alfred admits taking the items so that he can sell them for some extra spending money to go out with his friends.

Mrs. Higgins takes in this information and places her hand on Mr. Carr's arm and asks what his intentions are. Mr. Carr had planned to phone the police, but Mrs. Higgins calmly requests that Mr. Carr pass along advice in lieu of punishment in this case.

Alfred is amazed as he watches his mother interact with Mr. Carr, who relents and does not call the authorities. Mr. Carr can tell that Mrs. Higgins is a fine woman and is amenable to her suggestion to let Alfred go home with her now. Mr. Carr fires Alfred and Mrs. Higgins tells Mr. Carr that she will never forget his kindness in this matter and she and Mr. Carr part almost as if they had been good friends.

Alfred has mixed emotions as he walks home at his mother's side, being relieved that he escaped severe punishment while also in awe of his mother's amazing performance in Mr. Carr's store on his behalf. Alfred at least has the good sense to keep quiet once he sees his mother's stern expression in profile. It is only when the noise of an overhead train breaks the bubble of silence that Alfred speaks and tells her that he will not get into trouble like that again. Mrs. Higgins snaps at Alfred that he has once again disgraced her, saying that he should have the decency to be quiet now.

At home, Mrs. Higgins is more vocal and chastises Alfred for his continuing reprehensible behavior, and she sends him to bed with a warning not to mention the incident to his father. In his bedroom, Alfred can hear the sounds of his mother making tea in the kitchen and he walks quietly toward her and stops short by what he sees. Mrs. Higgins trembles as she tries to pour the hot water for tea, and she is so distressed that her hands can barely lift the cup to her mouth.

Alfred can see his mother's face now which looks old and tired and so different from the brave countenance she displayed just a short while ago in Mr. Carr's store. Mrs. Higgins finally regains her composure and it occurs to Alfred that this same scenario must have been played out in the kitchen each time Alfred caused his mother trouble.

Alfred now understands what his mother has endured and he sees all the years of her life reflected in her trembling hands and realizes that this is the first time he has ever really seen his mother.

Analysis

The most important theme of this short story is that of unconditional love. At first, it appears that Mrs. Higgins is a clever woman who is able to use her wiles to extricate Alfred from his trouble at work. Later, though, it is revealed that Alfred has often created problems, and his mother still comes to his rescue, bringing the concept of unconditional, motherly love into play.

Alfred's age is unclear, but the perception is that he is old enough to be living on his own. His inability to maintain a job prevents him from doing so, though. As a result, he must continue to live at home extending Mrs. Higgins' emotional burden so that she is past the point of emotional collapse. This validates even further the love that Mrs. Higgins has for Alfred in spite of the disappointments and strain he has placed on her life.

Up until this point, Alfred shows an immature attitude regarding his troubles and even comments on the way home this evening that he is glad everything turned out the way it did. Not surprisingly, he never expresses any remorse. It is not until the end of the story that Alfred shows some sensitivity and maturity as he watches his mother's near collapse in her kitchen. Perhaps this newfound empathy will be a turning point for Alfred, who sees his mother with not only his eyes but also his heart for the very first time.

Alfred comments that he now knows "all the years of her life" by watching his mother's trembling hands on this night and the author imparts a sense of hope that Alfred will mature into a fully functioning person who will no longer place a strain on his mother but will be able to enhance her life from this point on.

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Characters

Sam Carr

Sam Carr is the small gray-haired owner of the drugstore where Alfred works. He is a shrewd man, not easily fooled, and he has been aware for some time that Alfred has been pilfering items from the store. Mr. Carr also possesses some patience. He does not explode in anger at Alfred but remains polite and courteous, even though his manner is stern. He gives the impression of being a tolerant, kindly man. He says he likes Alfred and is quite ready to trust him, and he is in no rush to call the police when he finally confronts the young man about his petty crimes. He just wants to do the right thing.

Alfred Higgins

Alfred Higgins is a young man possibly in his late teens. He has two older brothers and a younger sister who have married and left home, while he still lives with his parents. Alfred is an incompetent, immature young man who has difficulty holding a job. As the story begins, he has been working for six months in a drugstore, but he is about to be confronted by his employer about his habit of pilfering from the store. At first he tries to bluff and then lie his way out of the situation. When that does not work, his mother has to come and rescue him. However, the selfish Alfred grows psychologically during the course of the story. He realizes how hard his mother's life is, and he seems to be ready to make a new, more mature start to his own life.

Mrs. Higgins

Mrs. Higgins is Alfred's mother. She is plump, with a friendly manner. When Sam Carr calls and tells her of the situation with her son, she goes immediately to the drugstore, without even changing her clothes. She is obviously devoted to her son, although she is also fully aware of how badly he behaves and what trouble he causes her. She says nothing of this in her dealings with Mr. Carr, with whom she is charming, humble, and dignified. She succeeds in softening Mr. Carr's heart. On the way home with Alfred, however, Mrs. Higgins reveals another side of her personality when she speaks angrily to him, saying he has disgraced her. All in all, Mrs. Higgins is a woman under great strain. Her son is always getting into trouble, and her daughter, who is even younger than Albert, married against Mrs. Higgins's wishes. Mrs. Higgins often manages to project an image of strength, but in reality she is weak and almost at a breaking point.

Themes

Motherly Love

Mrs. Higgins displays a mother's devotion to her son. Her devotion is so great she is able to overcome the immensity of her own worries, frustrations, and traumas in order to come to his rescue.

It is clear from Mrs. Higgins's distressed manner in the kitchen after she and Alfred have returned from the drugstore that she is living under a great strain. She seems to be at a breaking point. This makes the reader appreciate the heroic effort she has just made to present a calm exterior to Mr. Carr. It must have taken a huge amount of focused will for her to do so. It was late at night when she received the call from the drugstore, and she left the house without getting properly dressed. The only thing on her mind was the welfare of her son. Whatever needed to be done, she would find the way to do it. She deals with Mr. Carr, who is justifiably angry, with a touching delicacy and a keen sense of what approach will work. She is not above using subtle feminine charm in order to persuade him to be lenient with her son. She makes no demands, and she does not challenge Mr. Carr. She merely offers an opinion (that at certain times good advice rather than punishment is what a boy needs). Her calm dignity becomes the dominant presence in the drugstore, and Mr. Carr softens.

Alfred notices what his mother is doing, but he does not understand why. He knows that if they were at home and someone suggested he be arrested, his mother would become very angry. But Mrs. Higgins has a mother's intuition about what qualities she needs to demonstrate at this moment. Her love for her son, the maternal love for which no sacrifice is too great, no task too hard, gives her the words she needs.

The striking nature of the change Mrs. Higgins undergoes when they arrive home only serves to highlight by contrast the supreme effort it must have taken to ease her son, who has disappointed her so many times, out of a difficult position. Her actions demonstrate the triumph of love, even in the most trying of circumstances.

Empathy, Knowledge, and Growing Up

At the beginning of the story, Alfred is an unimpressive young man with little to commend him. He has no empathy for others and does not feel it is wrong to steal from his employer. He steals just so he can keep up appearances with his friends. He seems shallow and incompetent. And yet by the end of the story, he has grown immensely. The growth begins when he goes to the kitchen, planning to thank his mother for the dignity and strength she showed in dealing with Mr. Carr. But Alfred finds out that his impression of his mother was not reality. The calm strength she projected was solely for his sake. Internally she was someone different. Alfred's sudden awareness of this fact completely arrests him. He has an insight into what his mother has had to go through in

her life; he understands all her silent tragedies. He also knows what she must have been thinking about as they walked home together. In this moment of empathy, knowledge, and insight, Alfred makes a leap beyond his own personal world, with its petty, selfish concerns, into the world of another person. He learns how to feel the pain of another person and, in so doing, glimpses a more mature way of living and being. In that moment, Alfred Higgins starts to grow up.

Style

Point of View

The story is told from the point of view of a selective omniscient narrator. This means that although the narrator, who is not a character in the story, can enter the mind of any character and relate what the character is thinking, in practice he limits himself to focusing on one character.

For example, the narrator gives little information about what Mr. Carr is thinking, since the drugstore owner's thoughts are obvious from his words and actions; he is annoyed at having a thief as an employee. Any more attention given to the workings of Mr. Carr's mind would distract the reader's attention from where the author wants it, which is on the mind of Alfred. Alfred is the main character, and the narrator's knowledge of what is going on inside Alfred's mind enables the reader to observe him from the inside as well as the outside.

The narrator also chooses not to see into the mind of Alfred's mother. The effectiveness of the scene in the drugstore depends on the reader's ignorance of Mrs. Higgins's true state of mind. The insight into Mrs. Higgins's inner world has to come later through Alfred. It is this fact that gives the story its forceful, moving conclusion, because what is important is not Mrs. Higgins's state of mind per se, but the effect it has on her son when he perceives it for the first time.

Realism

The story belongs to the literary movement known as realism. The writer of realism seeks to give the impression that he is presenting life as it is. The opposite of realism is romantic fiction, in which life is presented in a more adventurous or heroic light. Realism deals with commonplace characters engaged in ordinary day-to-day activities (working in a drugstore, for example) and going through experiences that might happen to anyone. It would be hard to find three more ordinary, undistinguished characters than Alfred, his mother, and Mr. Carr. And yet, as sometimes happens in realist fiction, Alfred's mother, through a great effort of will, manages to rise to a level that if not quite heroic, certainly has some nobility.

Historical Context

Canada did not officially become a country until 1867, so it has had a relatively short period to develop a distinctive literature of its own. Before Callaghan arrived on the scene in the late 1920s, few Canadian short-story writers had achieved any distinction. As Walter Allen points out in *The Short Story in English,* most pre-1920s Canadian literature also dealt either with pastoral life or with life in the wild, neither of which theme interested Callaghan, who grew up in an urban area.

The best respected Canadian literary predecessor to Callaghan is usually considered to be Duncan Campbell Scott (1862-1947). Scott was aware of the work of the best European writers of his time, such as Flaubert and Guy de Maupassant, which enabled him to produce work of above-average quality. Scott's best-known work of the three short story collections he published is *The Village of Viger* (1896).

Another Canadian writer of short stories, as well as poetry and novels, is Callaghan's contemporary, Raymond Knister (1899-1932). His stories are notable for their clarity and sharp realism. Callaghan himself acknowledged the high quality of Knister's work, but Knister's promising career was cut short by his premature death (he drowned in Lake St. Clair, Ontario, at the age of thirty-three). According to Allen, however, it is Callaghan whose work marked a new beginning for Canadian literature.

Callaghan made his living during the 1930s, publishing in the United States, not Canada. It was not easy for a Canadian writer of that period to get published in his own country. In "The Plight of Canadian Fiction," an essay Callaghan published in 1938 in the *University of Toronto Quarterly,* Callaghan advises young Canadian writers that, even if they have talent and write honestly, they will not get published in their own country unless they first are published elsewhere. Callaghan points out that the only Canadian writers who publish in Canada are those who are willing to shape their work into a predictable formula that will fit in with the demands of the "slick" mass-market magazines. According to Callaghan, the Canadian literary writer who is not prepared to compromise his own integrity to suit the needs of the marketplace will have no outlet for his work. The only reason Callaghan was able to make a living from his writing was because he published in what he called the "quality" magazines in the United States, such as *Harper's, Scribner's,* the *Atlantic, Esquire and the New Yorker.* His book publisher in the 1930s, Random House, was also an American company.

In the 1940s, more distinctive Canadian fiction began to emerge, published by Canadian publishers, in the work of Sinclair Ross (1908-1996) and Hugh Maclennan (1907-1990). These writers did not base their work on American or British models but on Canadian themes and Canadian identity. This development took some time to filter into the Canadian education system. A distinguished Canadian novelist, Margaret Laurence (1926-1987), recalled that when she was in high school in the early 1940s, she was not assigned a single book by a Canadian author. She believed that Canadians of that period seriously undervalued the literature written by their fellow Canadians.

Critical Overview

During the 1930s, Callaghan's short stories were highly regarded by critics and reviewers. His work was compared to that of Russian writers Leo Tolstoy and Anton Chekhov, both of whom were masters of the short-story form.

Wyndham Lewis favorably reviews the collection *Now That April's Here and Other Stories,* in which "All the Years of Her Life" appeared. The following comment from Lewis's review, which appears in Brandon Conron's *Morley Callaghan,* captures the essence of "All the Years of Her Life": "These are tales very full of human sympathy—a blending of all the events of life into a pattern of tolerance and mercy." Lewis admires the way almost all the stories in *Now That April's Here and Other Stories* end gently on a note of reconciliation.

Conron notes that the relationship between parents and children is the theme of many of the stories in *Now That April's Here and Other Stories,* and he highlights also the "double exposure" of Mrs. Higgins in "All the Years of Her Life." By this he means the contrast between the courageous display she puts on in the drugstore and the "frightened despair and trembling weakness" she exhibits in her home afterwards. Callaghan's stories, Conron observes, follow a certain pattern:

They are all self-contained anecdotes. Their opening is usually a declarative statement that sets the stage for a drama that most frequently is psychological and involves little action. A problem is posed and, by description, dialogue and internal monologue, the story moves with easy economy through a climax to an ending which may not resolve the dilemma but invariably leaves it haunting the reader's mind.

"All the Years of Her Life" clearly follows this formula.

Criticism

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

Critical Essay #1

Aubrey holds a Ph.D. in English and has published many articles on twentieth-century literature. In this essay, Aubrey discusses the style and structure of Callaghan's short stories, and considers the importance of the psychological moment of revelation experienced by the protagonists, especially Alfred in "All the Years of Her Life."

Sometimes there are moments in a person's life that open a door to revelation; moments when life discloses a great truth that had previously been hidden, and huge personal growth and change suddenly become possible. Such moments are surprising, often unasked for, and may well shake up and transform rigidly held perceptions and beliefs. They may be more valuable for a person than months or years of dull, predictable day-to-day living. Such a moment is the essence of Callaghan's "All the Years of Her Life," which seems like a slight story until the last paragraph, when one single perception on the part of Alfred changes his life completely. There are so many implications in that one moment of heightened perception and understanding that the story becomes almost a coming-of-age tale. It also puts in mind what literary critics call the "Romantic Moment," a moment of illuminated perception of a mundane event or object that is found preeminently in the poetry of William Wordsworth but also in modern prose writers, contemporaries of Callaghan such as James Joyce, Henry James, Joseph Conrad, and Virginia Woolf. Woolf called such moments "moments of vision," the "little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark" (quoted in M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature*).

A match struck in the dark is a perfect metaphor for the sudden illumination that comes to young Alfred. It is an inner rather than outer change that he undergoes (although outer change will no doubt follow). In "All the Years of Her Life," as is often the case in Callaghan's stories, not much happens on the surface. The external events can be related in a sentence: a young man is caught pilfering from his employer, but his mother persuades his employer not to call in the police. The reader's interest in the story does not focus primarily on the plot, nor does it center on Callaghan's style or his descriptive powers. The style is terse and unadorned, devoid of metaphor or figurative language of any kind. The diction is also plain, and the characters are described with a minimum of physical details. All the reader learns of the physical appearance of the characters is that Sam Carr is little and gray-haired; Alfred's mother is "large and plump, with a little smile on her friendly face"; and Alfred has a thin face with pimples, and his mother describes him as a "big fellow." Most creative-writing teachers would demand more of their students than this!

But Callaghan was fully aware of what he was doing. He had very clear ideas about the way he wanted to write. He stated his credo in his memoir, *That Summer in Paris,* in which he noted that as a young man he rejected many of the most popular writers of the day, including Edith Wharton and H. G. Wells, as "show-off writers; writers intent on proving to their readers that they could be clever and had some education." His goal as a writer was to concentrate on "revealing the object as it was." Elaborate language only

took attention away from the object or event described and put the focus on the writer himself. Callaghan's language therefore resembles the economical, objective style of a reporter (as Callaghan was for a short time) rather than a literary writer. "Tell the truth cleanly," was his watchword. He remembers listening one evening at twilight to the sound of birdsong and a woman's voice, and making it his task to describe what he heard in a way that did not sound like literature.

If Callaghan's style is direct and to the point, the structure of "All the Years of Her Life" follows a formula that characterizes many of the stories in the collection *Now That April's Here,* as Victor Hoar has pointed out in his book *Morley Callaghan.* Hoar identifies this structure as "prelude, confrontation, revelation." The prelude contains the exposition and also starts off the action, which quickly builds to a quarrel or disagreement or some kind of misunderstanding (confrontation). Then follows a resolution in which the protagonist reaches a usually positive new understanding of some important aspect of life (revelation).

What sticks in the reader's mind is usually the revelation. Often, as in "All the Years of Her Life," this comes right at the end of the story. In Callaghan's "Possession," for example, the only bright spot in the life of Dan, an unemployed young man, is his growing friendship with a young woman named Helen. He is devastated when Helen tells him she must leave town to care for her sick mother. After he sees her off on the subway, Dan feels alone, with nothing in the world to call his own, and he reproaches himself for allowing Helen to leave. But then comes the mysterious moment with which the story ends. As he walks along the street, Dan feels the life of the city surging within him, with all its noise and traffic, and he suddenly realizes that his happiness did not depend on Helen at all: "He felt he held it all in him, he felt all the joy of full possession, and he could never be alone again."

Another example of a moment of revelation occurs in Callaghan's story "Younger Brother." It is particularly interesting because to create the moment, Callaghan repeats a plot device that is central to "All the Years of Her Life." It occurs when the protagonist observes another character, or in the case of "Younger Brother," two characters, without the character or characters being aware of it. What the protagonist sees shocks him. In "Younger Brother," young Jimmie comes home and finds his elder sister Millie sitting on the sofa with her boyfriend, an unpleasant man whom Jimmie dislikes. As Jimmie watches and listens unobserved, the couple appears to quarrel and the boyfriend slaps Millie lightly across the face. Jimmie expects his feisty sister to strike him back, but instead she begins to cry. Seeing this, Jimmie's world begins to crumble: "Everything important and permanent in Jimmie's life now seemed beyond him."

Although the plot device and the moment of revelation are similar, the content and effects of Jimmie's moment are quite different than those of Alfred in "All the Years of Her Life." Whereas Alfred grows in knowledge, Jimmie lapses into confusion (although by the end of the story Jimmie has managed to adjust to new realities).

This analysis shows that what counts in Callaghan's stories is a change in perspective on the part of the protagonist. Before the critical moment, the protagonist sees his life in

a certain way, with certain structures and meanings. But after the moment of change comes, everything becomes different. The whole meaning of life undergoes a seismic shift. In no story is this shift more apparent than "All the Years of Her Life."

Perhaps one way of looking at Alfred's moment of transformation is to analyze it in terms of healthy or unhealthy personality types. At the beginning of the story, Alfred does not look like promising material. He gives every impression of being thoroughly selfish and unaware of the effect of his actions on others. He has little awareness of the strain his mother is under, or what her life is really like, until that extraordinary moment when he observes her trembling hand as she raises the tea cup to her lips. In that moment he makes a huge transition to healthy adulthood ("his youth seemed to be over") because he has learned to empathize with another human being. Empathy is the beginning of compassion, for it is hardly possible for a fully developed individual to see into the suffering of another, as Alfred does here, and not feel compassion. The opposite of the empathetic individual is what psychologists call a narcissistic personality. The narcissist is easily recognizable as the person who always steers a conversation back to himself. In the eyes of the narcissist, everything revolves around him, and he is largely unaware of the needs and perspectives of other people. This is also true of the sociopath, who is incapable of empathy and merely uses others to gratify his own needs.

Between these two extremes—the healthy and unhealthy personality type—there is a gap the size of the Grand Canyon, and Alfred shows in his breakthrough moment that he can make the leap. He is helped by the situation upon which he stumbles, because it gives him the chance to observe a familiar person when that person is unaware of his presence. In social situations, humans often disguise themselves, whether consciously or unconsciously. The face they present to others may not reflect the thoughts and feelings they are really experiencing. In many situations this may be entirely necessary, and in the story Mrs. Higgins shows in the drugstore that she is a master of such disguises, or masks, when the need arises. Equally, however, the masks people wear may stifle real communication. And naturally when people think they are alone they tend to drop the masks they habitually wear in other situations. Therefore Alfred's mother, thinking she no longer has to keep up appearances, unwittingly helps to facilitate the crucial moment when Alfred sees her in a new light. Alfred, of course, must still have the perceptiveness and maturity to notice the difference and allow the implications of it to sink deeply into his mind.

The irony of human life is that two people can often spend many years in close proximity to each other and never have an "Alfred moment"—that is, never have much insight into the essence and reality of the other person's life. This often leads to a lack of communication, and eventually a wall is built up between them that is impossible to penetrate. There can be great distance in proximity, as appears to have been the case for Alfred and his mother. It is particularly significant that the incident in the story involves a parent and child. Since adolescents are so fully occupied trying to find their own place in the world, they may find it hard to see their oh-so familiar parents as individuals in their own right, with feelings and needs of their own. Often those whom a person most needs to see in a fresh light are the ones closest to them.

This is why the last line of the story, "It seemed to him that this was the first time he had ever looked upon his mother" is so moving. The challenge of life is always to see anew, not to let the film of habit or custom dull or distort perception. The image of the trembling hand holding the teacup, and the effect this has on Alfred, is surely a secular version of an epiphany—the illuminated, transforming moment in which a spiritual reality shines through a mundane object. In *Stephen Hero,* James Joyce defined such a moment (quoted in Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*):

By an epiphany [Stephen] meant a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself. He believed that it was for the man of letters to record these epiphanies with extreme care, seeing that they themselves are the most delicate and evanescent of moments.

Although Callaghan was a realist through and through, a secular not a spiritual mind, he obeyed Joyce's injunction. The nonliterary literary man preserved that delicate moment of epiphany in an exquisite work of art, the short story, "All the Years of Her Life."

Source: Bryan Aubrey, Critical Essay on "All the Years of Her Life," in *Short Stories for Students,* Gale, 2004.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay excerpt, Walsh discusses "All the Years of Her Life," focusing on the "moment[s] of consciousness - of true recognition" in the story.

It would be hard to find a writer who contrasts more vigorously with Katherine Mansfield than the Canadian Morley Callaghan, whom I wish to consider now. For one thing he works at a much greater psychic distance from, and with a considerably lower degree of sympathy for, the English literary tradition, in which Katherine Mansfield felt so intimately at home. For another, there is in his work, as in that of other Canadians writing in English, a further strain, an implicit sense of oppression by the powerful tradition of the United States. Moreover, Morley Callaghan is a writer whose intentions are simpler than those of Katherine Mansfield, and whose achievement is more restricted - a difference manifested in the contrast of their prose styles: where hers is poetic and suggestive, his is crabbed; where hers is light and gliding, his is stiff. And how extraordinarily discrepant are the materials they treat and the worlds they construct. The world evoked in Morley Callaghan's work is a bleak, industrial one, and its gritty presence rubs off even on the countryside. It is a shut-in, remorseless place in which the individual person even when he lives in a family is painfully isolated. Morley Callaghan's characters in the short stories, with which I shall begin, are mostly drawn from the middle and lower reaches of society: the bereaved poor, the workman, the forsaken wife, the widow, the hard-up young man, the nervous curate and the elderly parish priest, the part-time pugilist, the small girl with a dying mother, the amateur criminal, the drug-store keeper, the apprentice reporter, the cocky young man, the pianist in the tavern. His style is plain to the point of drabness and often painfully clumsy, and yet, in spite of the raw, northern world, the graceless manner and the dreary ordinariness of the characters, the reader is increasingly conscious of an awkward, stubborn and unfashionable conscience, and of a bluntly honest endeavour to dig out and to hold on to some evasive human truth.

'To dig out': as I use the phrase to convey something of Morley Callaghan's hard, blow-by-blow prose, it comes to me that the words say more about him than I had thought. They carry with them a sense of investigation and reporting, and Callaghan's stories strike one precisely as reports - as reporters' reports, in fact. They give the feeling of pre-1914-18 provincial newspaper chronicles, and sometimes of provincial newspaper prose, too. (In fact, Morley Callaghan began his career as a reporter on the *Toronto Star* when Ernest Hemingway was working on the same newspaper.) The storyteller's function as Morley Callaghan practises it is in keeping with this bias in his work. It is to impose an arrest upon time, and to outline for a moment an interruption in the flow of life, which, it is clear, continues as before once the observer's eye is withdrawn. His is a restrictive, framing technique. He is concerned with events, which are shown as instances and images of experience, while the people involved are planed down to an extreme simplicity. A Morley Callaghan story presents a special combination of realistically rendered happening and of people denuded of complication, who are seen as strangers are seen in the street in a single concentrated glance, as types and illustrations. Realism, and a somehow surprising strain of formality, blend in a personal

way. Indeed, as the reader begins to find his way about the stories, he becomes gradually aware - the effect is slow and cumulative - of an authentic individuality strong enough to show through the plain prose and the straightforward narrative technique.

The reader's sense of that presence is arrived at by continuous application. The unremarkable medium, which has none of the literary sophistication of Hemingway, one of Callaghan's early heroes, takes time to make its mark. And yet it is exactly suited in its unpretentiously humdrum way to the intention on which all this work is sprung, the effort at scrupulous fidelity to the facts of the case. And the 'case' in these stories is the mysteriousness of the ordinary, the inexplicable sequences of feeling, the bewildering discrepancies of human fact, and the logic, 'as severe as it is fleeting' as Coleridge has it, which the imagination can elicit from these frictions and inconsequences.

Short stories by Morley Callaghan appeared in 1929 (*A Native Argosy*), 1931 (*No Man's Meat*), and 1936 (*Now That April's Here*), and in the twovolume collection (Morley Callaghan Stories, 1959). Most of them are strikingly uniform in quality and even a random choice provides the characteristic Callaghan combination, an undistracted concentration on essentials, a rather grouchy but unquestionable honesty, a grave sobriety of mood and treatment and a naturally discriminating moral imagination. Let me look for a moment at the first story, "*All the Years of her Life,*" in the 1959 collection. The dim and oddly innocent Alfred Higgins is caught by his employer pilfering from the drugstore in which he works silly little objects which he sells for spending money. From this thin, commonplace situation there springs a movement towards complexity, not through analysis but by the natural growth of the action. Alfred's crime, at first denied, and then admitted, becomes an event, a phenomenon, which is gravely scrutinised by Mr Carr, the employer, Alfred himself, who from now on is the registering instrument rather than an active protagonist, and Mrs Higgins, Alfred's mother. She is large and plump with a little smile on a friendly face and seems an intensely positive person beneath her deference. The employer is dislodged from his position of moral superiority, which he had indeed begun to enjoy. Alfred realised that 'Sam Carr was puzzled by his mother, as if he had expected her to come in and plead with him tearfully, and instead he was being made to feel a bit ashamed by her vast tolerance. While there was only the sound of the mother's soft, assured voice in the store, Mr Carr began to nod his head encouragingly at her. Without being alarmed, while being just large and still and simple and hopeful, she was becoming dominant there in the dimly lit store.' The mother's contained strength deflects the angry proprietor. His expression of regret at what happened is almost an apology to her. When Alfred and his mother return to their home he begins to see that the force she showed in the shop was not what it seemed to be. It was not some intrinsic strength of character but a force which issued out of a passion for protection, and once home, with the crisis over, it collapses. As she drinks her tea her hand is trembling and she looks very old. 'He watched his mother, and he never spoke, but at that moment his youth seemed to be over; he knew all the years of her life by the way her hand trembled as she raised the cup to her lips. It seemed to him that this was the first time he had ever looked upon his mother.'

A moment of consciousness - of true recognition, not the usual routine registration - is necessary to clinch the existence of an event, like Alfred's petty crime, or a state of

feeling like the mother's weary anxiety, and as it were, to sanction the disturbance it will produce.

Source: William Walsh, "Morley Callaghan," in *A Manifold Voice: Studies in Commonwealth Literature,* Chatto and Windus, 1970, pp. 185-88.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay excerpt, Conron provides overviews of the stories in Now That April's Here, including "All the Years of Her Life."

Callaghan's second collection presents thirty-five selected stories written between 1929 and 1935. All of these had already been published in North American magazines except the title piece. It appeared in *This Quarter* (October-December, 1929) as the result of a bet which Edward Titus made with Callaghan and Robert McAlmon in Paris encouraging both to write a story expressing their contrasting views about two young men familiar in the Montparnasse of 1929. McAlmon never did write his story.

"Now That April's Here" comes fourth in the arrangement of the book. Its two chief characters, Charles Milford with his "large round head that ought to have belonged to a Presbyterian minister," and his younger companion Johnny Hill with his "rather chinless faun's head" arrive in Paris in the late autumn. They have left their native Middle West city convinced that the American continent has "nothing to offer them." They spend their afternoons wandering around the streets, admiring in art gallery windows such *objets d'art* as "the prints of the delicate clever unsubstantial line work of Foujita." In the evenings they sit together at the cafés, snickering at the conversation of other customers. Aspiring writers, they look forward to the stimulating spring days of April.

The story traces in dramatic interludes this autumn introduction, a winter in Nice and their eager return to Paris at the beginning of April. Ironically that month frustrates their expectations. For it brings cold and disagreeable weather, a temporary separation of the two friends as Johnny visits in England, and an irrevocable rift in their intimate relationships when Constance Foy, "a simple-minded fat-faced girl with a boy's body and short hair dyed red" becomes part of this unconventional love triangle. During the bright clear days while "Paris was gay and lively" as though in mockery of their romantic hopes, the boys are "sad and hurt and sorry." On the evening of the rainy day when Johnny leaves to return home to the United States with Constance, Charles sits forlornly at a café with his overcoat wrapped around him and wearing his large black American hat for the first time in Paris.

Throughout his depiction of these youths Callaghan carefully builds up details which authenticate the atmosphere of intimacy that surrounds his main figures as they move about the left bank circle: "People sitting at the café in the evening when the lights were on, saw them crossing the road together under the street lamp, their bodies leaning forward at the same angle and walking on tiptoe." Charles' nervous habit of "scratching his cheek with the nail of his right forefinger till the flesh was torn and raw," his way of raising his eyebrows, Johnny's manner of snickering with his finger over his mouth, and even their bedroom conversations all develop a concrete picture of their strange world. Callaghan's handling of this detail is full of clever suggestion and insinuation. Even the title has an appropriately ironic twist in terms of Browning's original application in "Home Thoughts from Abroad," as Johnny's April visit to England brings not spring joy but the autumnal decay of disintegrating family relationships, and the two boys never do

"recapture / The first fine careless rapture." Yet the story has an overall mocking brittleness of tone, which is not evident in the deft treatment of a somewhat similar theme in *No Man's Meat,* and which is different from Callaghan's customary compassionate or even detached interpretation of human aberrations.

Seven of the stories in Now *That April's Here* are included in J. Edward O'Brien's *The Best Short Stories* annual editions of 1930 through 1936. Set against selections of other writers, these tales provide a criterion of Callaghan's comparative skill in the genre as well as an indication of changes in his own technique. They also treat a variety of themes which are representative of his 1936 collection: young lovers' quarrels and problems; relations between parents and children; religious and miscellaneous subjects.

"The Faithful Wife," which appeared in the December 28, 1929 issue, was the first thirty-nine of Callaghan's stories to be published in *The New Yorker.* It is included not only in the 1930 edition of *The Best Short Stories* but also in O'Brien's *50 Best American Short Stories 1915-1939* (1939), as well as in Martha Foley's *Fifty Best American Short Stories 1915-1965* (1965). This piece catches mood of poignant frustration. A young woman Lola, whose husband is a war invalid, invites youthful lunch counter attendant George to her apartment on the last night before he leaves to enter college. The early winter setting is suggestively portrayed: the shoddy restaurant near the railway station, warming-up base for "brightly dressed and highly powdered" girls who are sharply contrasted with "gentle, and aloofly pleasant" Lola, and the older counter men with their knowing ways who urge on the naïve George, are realistically depicted. George's unexpected invitation to Lola's apartment and his nervous expectation are skilfully exploited as he finds Lola dressed in a tight fitting sweater and "almost savagely" responsive to his initial overtures. Yet for her these embraces are terminal. She has correctly assessed George's temperament - that he will "not spoil it for her." The story is typical of Callaghan in its moving insight into spiritual kinship, its sharpness of detail, and the final shift of frustration from the faithful wife Lola to the reluctantly noble young man.

"The Young Priest," originally published in *The New Yorker* of September 27, 1930 and included in the 1931 edition of *The Best Short Stories,* was later modified and expanded into a chapter in *A Broken Journey.* As noted already, this episode is a sensitive treatment of a young and inexperienced priest's introduction to the ugly actualities of life.

"The Red Hat," first published in the October 31, 1931 issue of *The New Yorker* and included in the 1932 edition of *The Best Short Stories,* expresses a frustrated yearning typical of the Depression era and appropriate to the autumn background against which it is set. A young wife Frances yields to the impulse to spend a great part of her weekly salary on a little red hat. Since her actor husband Eric, out of work for four months, "had been so moody and discontented recently she now thought with pleasure of pleasing him by wearing something that would give her a new elegance, of making him feel cheerful and proud of her and glad, after all, that they were married." Her eager modeling of the hat, however, precipitates a violent quarrel with Eric over the sensitive

subject of money. Anxious to conciliate him, she sells the hat to the landlady for a third of its original price.

The structure moves neatly in a circle with Frances' emotions being described in both the opening and the conclusion in similar language. Just as she had let her fancies wander in front of the silver-faced and red-lipped mannequin in the shop window, so she lets her hopes rise that she can buy the hat back from Mrs. Foley and feels "an eagerness and a faint elation; it was a plain little red hat, the kind of hat she had wanted for months, elegant and expensive, a plain felt hat, but so very distinctive." Frances' desire, hesitation and finely shaded rationalization are concretely conveyed. The scene in the shop, where the "deep-bosomed saleswoman, splendidly corseted, and wearing black silk" ingratiatingly smiles approval, and Frances' vision of her own face in the mirror resembling the mannequin's face, is neatly balanced by the home scene with Eric slumped disconsolately in his chair and savagely deflating Frances' dream of his admiring approbation.

"A Sick Call," which appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* of September, 1932 and was included in the 1933 edition of *The Best Short Stories,* probes a Roman Catholic priest's dilemma of conscience. Called to the bedside of a sick and frightened woman who has left the Church, old Father Macdowell meets the sullen opposition of her husband, John Williams. Behind the screen of his deafness, shortness of breath and tired legs, the priest succeeds in entering the bedroom which symbolically reminds him of a little girl's room with its light wall-paper with tiny birds in flight. John's protest against the priest's attempt to disrupt their spiritual kinship is futile in the face of Father Macdowell's patient persistence and even guile. Requesting a glass of water, he quickly hears Mrs. Williams' confession and gives absolution during the brief period in which her husband is out of the room getting the drink.

Throughout the story Father Macdowell is the focal figure. The significant details of his physical appearance and tolerant disposition are briefly sketched in the opening paragraph: his "wheezy breath," large build, "white-headed except for a shiny baby-pink bald spot on the top of his head," his florid face with its "fine red interlacing vein lines" and his tenderness with those who come to confess. All of these details are relevant to the bedroom scene and play a part in his battle of wits with John. Appropriately the conclusion returns to the priest as he goes home from the brief call pondering uneasily "whether he had played fair with the young man," whether he has come between the two, alternating ironically between "rejoicing amiably to think he had so successfully ministered to one who had strayed from the faith," and admiring sadly the staunch - if "pagan" - beauty of John's love for his wife.

"Mr. and Mrs. Fairbanks," first published in *Harper's Bazaar* (September, 1933) and included in the 1934 edition of *The Best Short Stories,* is a miniature drama of misunderstanding between two young married people. Walking arm in arm together in the park, they share their mixed emotions over the discovery that Helen Fairbanks is expecting a baby. Bill's pride and pleasure in his wife's condition gradually overcome her uncertainty and fear until they are both glowing with contentment. At this crucial moment they pass a bench where a tired, shabby old man is sitting looking like a

beggar. In an impulsive gesture of generosity Helen offers him a quarter which he declines with simple dignity. This silent rebuke arouses in her a mood of humiliation and injured pride that Bill's logically comforting remarks only accentuate. The happy contentment of a few moments before evaporates, the afternoon sunlight becomes "hot and withering, drying up the little bit of freshness there was in the park," and fear of future poverty and old age pervades her thoughts. As the couple turn homeward, keeping "a step away from each other, so their elbows would not touch," they hurry past the bench where the old man is seated. Glancing back Helen sees him "looking after them, and suddenly he smiled at her, smiling gently as if he had noticed in the first place that they had been happy and now were like two lovers who had quarreled." This understanding rapport restores the mutual glow shared by husband and wife.

In his portrayal of the Fairbanks Callaghan catches and registers how fragile human relationships may be. Although the background of the Depression sharpens their fears and anxieties in contemplation of the responsibilities of parenthood, the emotions represented have a universal application. Even man's response to the weather is conditioned by his feeling of the moment.

"Father and Son," published in *Harper's Bazaar,* June, 1934 and included in the 1935 edition of *The Best Short Stories,* explores the feelings of a father who after a four year interval visits a young son and his mother. Greg Henderson, moderately successful New York lawyer, is drawn by an inexplicable compulsion to the old stone farmhouse in Pennsylvania where his former wife Mona lives with her husband Frank Molsen. From the moment of his arrival Greg feels uneasily aware of how unimportant he has become in the life of Mona and his own son Mike, who is ignorant of his real parent's identity. Despite the natural antagonism between himself and Frank, Greg is able to establish a companionable relationship with Mike. Although he contemplates taking his son away with him, Greg realizes how wrong such an action would be, and takes a kind of resigned pride in the fact that Mike is a "fine boy."

This is a story of strong contrasts both in natural setting and in human characteristics. The dark hill and the shadow cast by the huge old barn stand out sharply in the moonlight and the flood of light from the window; the silence of the mist-laden valley is a sudden change for Greg who is accustomed to city noises. Tall and dark in expensive clothes, Greg is in physical contrast with Frank, short and fair in his leather jacket. Temperamentally, the distinction between the two is even more marked. Urban Greg seems lonely, wretched and out of place in the simple farm home of Mona, with her peaceful assurance, and of Frank, with his social revolutionary enthusiasm. The latter looks on this "no-account lawyer, a little bourgeois," as though "he were an old enfeebled man who had been a slave all his life." This sense of himself creeps into Greg's own mind as he listens to the symbolical sound of "the trickling of water in the nearly dried-up creek." Yet his pleasant day with his son and Mike's warm and spontaneous farewell bring a surge of joy to Greg which fills his emptiness and somehow unites him spiritually with Mona and Frank.

"The Blue Kimono," first published in the May, 1935 issue of *Harper's Bazaar* and included in the 1936 edition of *The Best Short Stories,* conveys with restraint the

powerful feelings of a young couple when their son falls ill. Waking at dawn, George finds his wife Marthe nursing their feverish boy Walter, whom she suspects of having infantile paralysis. This new calamity triggers an outburst of bitterness from George over the bad luck which had dogged them ever since coming to the city. The corrosive effect of six months' unemployment on their bright dreams and aspirations, their fine resolutions and plans, seems to him to be symbolized by his wife's tattered blue kimono:

The kimono had been of a Japanese pattern adorned with clusters of brilliant flowers sewn in silk. George had given it to her at the time of their marriage; now he stared at it, torn as it was at the arms, with pieces of old padding hanging out at the hem, with the light-coloured lining showing through in many places, and he remembered how, when the kimono was new, Marthe used to make the dark hair across her forehead into bangs, fold her arms across her breasts, with her wrists and hands concealed in the sleeve folds, and go around the room in the bright kimono, taking short, prancing steps, pretending she was a Japanese girl.

As the boy's temperature drops under the effect of an aspirin, however, both father and mother gain new hope. Mutual concern for their child deepens their own love for each other. The quiet implications of this changed mood are subtly indicated as Marthe, taking off the kimono, is suddenly sure that she can "draw the torn parts together and make it look bright and new."

In "Day by Day" the discouraging effect of unemployment is particularly evident. This compact story, originally published in *The New Yorker* of August 20, 1932, treats the theme of suspicion and jealousy nourished by economic distress. Pretty young Madge Winslow, after an innocent afternoon of window-shopping, relaxes peacefully in the park and dreams of recapturing with her husband John the eager spontaneity of their days of romance. Uncomplaining of the failure of their plans "or that her husband went from one job to another and the work was always less suited to him," she timidly asks "God to make her husband content, without any suspicion of her." Arriving home late, by her very animation and inner warmth she excites a jealous outburst from John. When he walks out of the house angry and embarrassed by his violence and lack of faith, Madge sits down to await his return:

Tears were in her eyes as she looked around the mean little kitchen. She had such a strange feeling of guilt. White-faced and still, she tried to ask herself what it was that was slowly driving them apart day by day.

Accentuated by the conditions of the Depression era, the dilemma, frustration, paradox and disillusionment involved in the adjustment of a married couple are all subtly suggested or concretely portrayed; the very beauty which attracts a young man can also make him a suspicious husband; the cruel misunderstandings of married life are in stark contrast with the carefree gaiety and trust of courtship; youthful hopes often dissolve in the harsh actualities of experience; and hope itself may sometimes seem an affront to the miserable. More pervasively than many of the pieces in Callaghan's collection, "Day by Day" reflects the mood of pessimism of the thirties which intensified the age-old problems of young lovers.

When he was requested in 1942 to select his own favorite story for Whit Burnett's collection of "over 150 self-chosen and complete masterpieces" from "America's 93 living authors" published in *This Is My Best* (1943), Callaghan submitted "Two Fishermen." This story treats a typically Callaghan theme of human justice through an interesting series of ironic contrasts. Young Michael Foster, only reporter for the small town *Examiner,* discovers the identity of the man K. Smith who has arrived to hang Michael's old acquaintance Thomas Delaney, convicted of killing his wife's molester. In an evening of fishing together Michael and Smitty come to understand each other. The next morning after the hanging in the jail Smitty magnanimously gives to Michael two fish caught that morning. Shortly afterwards outside the jail yard these same fish are seized by one of the angry crowd and thrown at the hangman.

The peaceful setting of Collingwood on Georgian Bay, with "the blue hills beyond the town . . . shining brilliantly on square patches of farm land," seems incongruous with the hangman's grim purpose. In his explanation of why he chose this story for inclusion in *This Is My Best* Callaghan comments on the warm human relationship which developed between the young reporter and the executioner, as well as

the hangman's rather wistful attachment to his despised job and his realization that it gave him an opportunity to get around the country and enjoy himself as a human being and a fisherman. And then after I had written it I saw that it had a certain social implication that I liked. The hangman, a necessary figure in society, a man definitely serving the public and the ends of justice, was entitled to a little human dignity. In fact he saw himself as a dignified human being. But of course as an instrument of justice he became a despised person, and even his young friend, who understood his wistful humanity, betrayed that humanity when the chips were down. If I had started out to write the story with that in mind it might have become very involved but I wrote it very easily and naturally and without any trouble at all.

The contrast between Smitty in his human aspect and Mr. K. Smith as a public official is striking. As a fisherman dressed in casual clothes he is a small shy man "with little gray baby curls on the back of his neck," proud father of five children and an amusing raconteur. As an executioner "dressed in a long black cut-away coat with gray striped trousers, a gates-ajar collar and a narrow red tie" he walks with military precision and carries himself "with a strange cocky dignity." These two aspects of his personality are neatly brought together in the image of the two fish which he gives to Michael. They exemplify for both Michael and Smitty the fact that man is not only an individual but is also a creature of society. The fish, symbolical evidence of friendship, also become in the closing episode instruments of human betrayal and shameful rejection.

The stories of *Now That April's Here* have a remarkably uniform quality. The themes of the remaining twenty-five will be briefly noted. Several treat a variety of dreams, misunderstandings or entanglements of lovers: "The Rejected One," a family's disapproval of a young man's gaudy belle as a suitable marriage partner; "Guilty Woman," a young woman's stolen moment of love with her older sister's sweetheart; "Let Me Promise You," the attempt to recapture a former beau by an expensive birthday present; "Ellen," an unmarried pregnant woman's hope that her lover will return;

"Timothy Harshaw's Flute," a young couple's impractical dream of moving to Paris; "The Snob," a lovers' quarrel resulting from a young man's sense of shame in snubbing his poor father; "The Two Brothers," the complex influence of a prodigal upon his older brother's love affair; "The Bride," the need for mutual attention in marriage; "One Spring Night," the natural warmth and the frustration of adolescent love; "It Must Be Different," the stifling effect of parental suspicion on young love; "Younger Brother," a boy's ignorant confusion about his sister's attitude to men; "Three Lovers," an older man's loss of his loved one to a younger rival through lack of trust; "The Duel," a former beau's failure to win back his girl; "Silk Stockings," a frustrated attempt to win a girl's approval by a birthday present; "Rigmarole," the need to preserve in married love the sentimentalities of courtship; and "Possession," the recognition that a woman's genuine concern for her lover is superior to mere physical surrender.

Other stories in the collection reflect Callaghan's understanding of family life and the relationship between parents and children. The initial story, "All the Years of Her Life," which was included in *Short Stories from The New Yorker* (1940), presents a double exposure of a mother whose son is detected in petty larceny. Her public display of courageous dignity and calm strength as she dissuades his employer from prosecuting are balanced in her own home by a private expression of frightened despair and trembling weakness. The effect of family dissension on both parents and children is portrayed in "The Runaway," in which the quarrels of his father and stepmother so magnify a boy's own little failures that he runs away. "A Separation" reveals the unhappy result of a broken home and the tensions which arise between a deserted husband and his son.

The remaining pieces concern diverse aspects of human aspiration, disappointment and adjustment. In "Shining Red Apple" a fruit dealer gives vent to his resentment over not having a son by tormenting a hungry boy. "Lunch Counter" dramatizes the suspicions of a frustrated sensualist and his prudish wife who spoil an innocent friendship between a cook and a teen-age girl. In "Rocking Chair" the symbol of a young widower's love for his deceased wife is misinterpreted by an aggressive female friend as a token of favor toward her. "An Old Quarrel" contrasts the significance of petty animosities of bygone days with the richness of memories of happy times together. A priest's visit in "Absolution" arouses in an alcoholic woman "a faintly remembered dignity" of past respectability. In "Sister Bernadette" an illegitimate baby becomes the symbol of the sacrificed motherhood of a hospital nun.

Now That April's Here indicates both continuity and change in Callaghan's fictional technique. As in his earlier *A Native Argosy,* the stories, although distinctive and individual in flavor, do follow a recognizable formula. They are all self-contained anecdotes. Their opening is usually a declarative statement that sets the stage for a drama that most frequently is psychological and involves little action. A problem is posed, and, by description, dialogue and internal monologue, the story moves with easy economy through a climax to an ending which may not resolve the dilemma but invariably leaves it haunting the reader's mind. Sometimes the conclusion returns full cycle to the same emotional attitudes introduced initially, and these are then perceived in the light of a changed situation. Few violent passions are depicted, and little humor is

displayed except in the quiet irony which pervades the style. A sure sense of significant detail and mood, and an unobtrusive use of symbolism contribute suggestive overtones of universality.

There are, however, obvious changes in the stories of this second collection. The chronological duration is briefer. The settings are authentically American, since many of the stories were actually written in New York about that city, and its streets are often mentioned by name. The tales reflect the conditions of the Depression era. The depiction of family life involving children is more frequent. The syntax is tighter and the overall structure more artful than in *A Native Argosy.* The characters, although still unpretentious and ordinary people, are generally more intelligent and more sophisticated than the bewildered persons of earlier stories with whom the average reader has difficulty identifying himself. Callaghan interprets this cross-section of humanity with sympathy yet detachment. His tales have a restraint, an unstressed reticence and a deceptive gentleness that subtly convey to the reader the quiet implications of the awkward emotional predicaments and fluctuations between happiness and despair which occur in intimate relationships. In his adroit handling of those commonplace actions that involve failure to adjust to circumstances or personalities, Callaghan in these later stories leaves the reader with a profound awareness of a universal truth: respect for individual dignity, patience and understanding love provide the best solution to the problems of life.

Source: Brandon Conron, "The End of an Era," in *Morley Callaghan,* Twayne Publishers, 1966, pp. 97-108.

Adaptations

"All the Years of Her Life" was adapted as a film by the same name in 1974. It was directed by Robert Fortier and stars Carl Marotte, Walter Wakefield, and Mary Gay Pinatel.

Topics for Further Study

Describe an incident in your own life when you had a moment of revelation about someone. What truth did you see that was not apparent to you before, and how did it change the way you behaved afterwards?

Do you think that Mr. Carr should have turned Alfred over to the police? Would Alfred have been better off in the long run by being prosecuted, or is his realization of how much his mother is suffering going to be sufficient for him to change his ways? Explain your answer based on events in the story.

Write a short story approximately two pages in length that follows the structure of many of the stories in Callaghan's collection *Now That April's Here and Other Stories.* Your story should consist of a brief prelude, in which the situation is explained, followed by a confrontation. The confrontation should lead to some moment of realization (or revelation) on the part of the protagonist in which he or she reaches a new understanding of life or a fresh understanding of his or her relationship with someone else. Limit the story to three characters or fewer.

Research the Great Depression of the 1930s. What were the causes of the depression? What was life like for those who were unemployed or underemployed? How did people survive such hardships? What changes did the Great Depression bring about in social and economic policy in the United States and Canada?

Rewrite "All the Years of Her Life" from the point of view of Mr. Carr. Show how he reacts to what happens. Show what he thinks and feels. For the final scene, after Mrs. Higgins and Alfred have left, show Mr. Carr reflecting on what has happened and wondering whether he made the right decision. Give him a moment of revelation, when he realizes something about life that had not struck him before.

Compare and Contrast

1930s: Canadian literature is still in its infancy and is not known for having distinctive characteristics of its own. English-speaking Canadians tend to read mostly British or American fiction, but Callaghan brings a new voice to Canadian fiction.

Today: Canadian literature is in the forefront of world literature. Writers such as Alice Munro, Margaret Atwood, Michael Ondaatje, Yann Martel, Alistair Macleod, and Carol Shields have won such international awards as Britain's prestigious Booker Prize and the American Pulitzer Prize for their work.

1930s: The political situation in Europe is rapidly deteriorating. In 1936, the year Callaghan's *Now That April's Here and Other Stories* is published, German troops under Adolf Hitler's leadership march into the Rhineland. The three-year civil war in Spain also begins in 1936. In 1939 World War II begins.

Today: Europe has overcome many of the consequences of the events of the 1930s and 1940s. Germany is no longer divided into East and West Germany. The Iron Curtain no longer divides eastern and western Europe. Spain is a democracy. The European Community is steadily expanding, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is gradually increasing its membership to include nations that were formerly members of the communist Soviet bloc.

1930s: The Great Depression creates hardship for millions of people in North America. At the height of the depression in Canada in 1933, unemployment is at 27 percent. Between 1929 and 1933, Canadian gross national product drops 43 percent. The depression ends in 1939.

Today: Canada enjoys far greater economic stability and its citizens enjoy more security than was the case in the 1930s. Today's laws, which regulate a standard work week and a minimum wage as well as programs such as Medicare and unemployment insurance, arose from depression- era needs. The Bank of Canada, a central bank that manages the money supply and creates financial stability, also grew out of the Great Depression.

What Do I Read Next?

Such Is My Beloved (1934) is widely considered to be Callaghan's finest novel. It tells the story of a young priest who tries to rescue two prostitutes, depicting a world where cynicism and betrayal are common but also where a divine love redeems the fallen.

The Oxford Book of Canadian Short Stories in English (1986), edited by Margaret Atwood and Robert Weaver, contains forty-one short stories written during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Authors include Mordecai Richler, Alice Munro, Sinclair Ross, Stephen Leacock, and Callaghan, as well as other, less well-known writers.

Alice Munro's *Selected Stories* (1997) is a representative selection of the work of a Canadian writer considered one of the greatest contemporary short-story writers. Her subject matter is often the troubled lives of women in small-towns in Ontario, but her art transcends its rather narrow base and has universal appeal.

The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway: The Finca Vigia Edition (1998) is the definitive collection of Hemingway's stories and can be used to compare his work with that of Callaghan, his friend and contemporary.

Further Study

Boire, Gary, *Morley Callaghan and His Works,* Canadian Author Studies series, ECW Press, 1990.

This short seventy-page study contains a concise biography of Callaghan, a description of the tradition and milieu that influenced him, a survey of criticism, an essay on his most important works, and a bibliography of primary and secondary sources.

----, *Morley Callaghan: Literary Anarchist,* ECW Press, 1994.

This biography emphasizes Callaghan's early years through the 1940s. Boire addresses the claim made by Edmund Wilson that Callaghan has been unjustly neglected. Boire regards Callaghan as a literary anarchist, by which he refers to the writer's fierce individualism. The book includes a chronology of Callaghan's life, but there is no index.

Cameron, Donald, "Morley Callaghan," in *Conversations with Canadian Novelists,* Part 2, Macmillan, 1973, pp. 17-33.

This work contains an interview with Callaghan in which he talks about the importance of independence to a writer, the sources of his inspiration, his interest in Christian theology, the attitude of Canadians to their own literature, and other topics.

Lynch, Gerald, and Angela Arnold Robbeson, eds. *Dominant Impressions: Essays on the Canadian Short Story,* University of Ottawa Press, 1999.

The introduction highlights issues in short-story theory and provides a concise history of Canadian short fiction in English. The essays deal with the period before the 1960s and examine the sociological, historical, and cultural aspects of Canadian short stories from the nineteenth century through the 1940s.

Wilson, Edmund, "Morley Callaghan of Toronto," in *New Yorker,* Vol. XXXVI, No. 41, November 26, 1960, p. 224.

At the time that noted literary critic Wilson wrote this article, Callaghan's reputation was in a slump, but Wilson argues that Callaghan was the most unjustly neglected novelist in the English-speaking world. Wilson regards Callaghan as superior to his more famous contemporaries Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Short Stories for Students (SSfS) 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, SSfS 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 SSfS 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 SSfS 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 SSfS 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 SSfS 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

SSfS 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 Short Stories 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 SSfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS 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 Short Stories for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Short Stories 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 SSfS 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.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

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

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Short Stories 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 SSfS, 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 Short Stories 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 SSfS, 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 Short Stories 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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