Boys and Girls Study Guide

Boys and Girls by Alice Munro

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Introduction

"Boys and Girls" was first published in 1968 in *The Montrealer*, before it was collected with fourteen other stories and published in Alice Munro's first edition of short stories, *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1968). The story, narrated by a young girl, details the time in her life when she leaves childhood and its freedoms behind and realizes that to be a "girl" is to be, eventually, a woman. The child begins to understand that being socially typed entails a host of serious implications. Thus becoming a "girl" on the way to womanhood is a time fraught with difficulties for the young protagonist because she senses that women are considered the social inferiors of men. Initially, she tries to prevent this from occurring by resisting her parents' and grandparents' attempts to train her in the likes, habits, behavior, and work of women. This resistance, however, proves to be useless. The girl ends the story clearly socially positioned as a girl, something which she apprehends with some trepidation. The story is thus a feminist parable of sorts, where a girl bucks against a future that will prevent her from doing, socially, whatever she might please. Although most of Munro's work does not have such clear and cogent feminist interest, this story eloquently attests to how women worked during this century to change their social position substantially.

Munro's fiction writing evinces subtle but definite changes throughout her career, and one of the pleasures of reading her fiction is noticing these developments. Nevertheless, *"Boys and Girls"* is also representative of Munro's work as a whole, as the story's formal strategies can be linked to general trends in her writing. For example, Munro is known for her use of irony, and this story contains numerous ironic flourishes. As the girl protagonist is being groomed to curb her wild behavior and pay attention to her manner of dress and her looks in general, Munro lavishly fleshes out the appearance of the mother, whose labor intensive housework makes it necessary for her to ignore such things entirely. Thus, as the young girl is trained to be vain, an adult woman is presented whose lifestyle in fact precludes such vanity. The girl's mother ties up her hair and wraps it in a scarf, and favors simple clothing that suits her workaday habits.

Author Biography

Alice Munro was born Alice Laidlaw in 1931, in Wingham, Ontario, Canada. She grew up near the Great Lakes that border the United States and Canada, in rural environs such as are featured in much of her early fiction. She attended public schools and was considered such a good student that she advanced a grade early on. She began writing fiction while in high school, and even wrote a novel during this time which she has said was derivative of Emily Bronte's famous *Wuthering Heights*. She won a scholarship to attend the University of Western Ontario and spent two years there as an English major. It was there that she first published short stories, in a university publication. She left the university upon her marriage to James Munro, when the couple moved to British Columbia.

During the 1950s, Munro continued to write while raising her first two daughters. She sold some of her stories to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation for dramatization and radio shows. Munro had a third daughter in 1966, and then in 1968 her first collection of short stories, *The Dance of the Happy Shades*, was published. "Boys and Girls" is from this first collection of stories. Munro's only novel was published in 1971. In 1974 a second collection of stories was published. With this third publication Munro established herself as a contemporary writer of note.

Munro has seven published books to her credit, six of which are collections of short stories, making her a specialist in the short story genre. Most national literatures have writers who specialize in this way, another notable author being Anton Chekhov, an early twentieth-century Russian writer famous for his short stories. It has often been said, therefore, that Munro is Canada's Chekhov.

Munro's fiction is consistently favorably received by critics and the reading public alike, and she has won numerous awards for her writing. She has been invited to be Writer-in-Residence at various universities, including her alma mater, the University of Western Ontario (which conferred her an Honorary D.Litt. in 1976).

Plot Summary

"Boys and Girls" opens with the unnamed narrator describing her father and his work. He is a fox farmer who raises silver foxes which are skinned so that their fur can be sold to fur traders. The narrator, a girl at the time the story takes place, and her smaller brother Laird, enjoy watching their father doing skinning work, which he does in the cellar of their house each fall or early winter when the foxes' coats are prime. The girl also describes her father's farm hand, Henry Bailey.

She tells how in bed at the end of the day she can still smell foxes, and that this makes her comfortable. She describes the room she and her brother share, and the elaborate rules they have so that they feel safe within the surrounding darkness of night. At first, with the bedside light still on, they are "safe" as long they do not stray beyond the carpet surrounding their beds. This is to keep them suitably removed from the terrifying area beyond their beds that serves as a sort of attic storage space, and which seems very menacing when it is dark. Once the light is off only the beds themselves are safe, and the two children sing songs until Laird falls asleep. Once Laird is asleep, the narrator settles down to imagine adventurous stories in which she is in the role of the grand hero.

The narrator then goes on to detail how the foxes are penned and cared for, and what the specific chores are that she performs to help her father. For example, she feeds and waters the foxes, rakes the ground around the pens. Laird is too young to be of much help. The narrator describes how when she helps her mother in the house (something she does not like to do), her mother tells her "all sorts of things." Her father is more reserved and she feels shy around him.

The narrator overhears a conversation in which her mother laments how she (the narrator) always runs off when she can, to avoid more work in the house, and her mother goes on to say that she is looking forward to the day when her daughter will be older and more able and willing to help in the house. The narrator is not pleased to overhear conversations such as these, and although she thinks her mother is "kinder" than her father, she also thinks of her mother as her "enemy," as someone who is plotting to curtail her freedoms.

Next we learn what the foxes are fed. They are fed horsemeat which her father procures by buying old or lame horses which he then shoots. Sometimes he buys perfectly healthy horses due to the fact that farm machinery is replacing the need for workhorses, and farmers sometimes simply have no more use for a horse and so sell it. Time moves on for the narrator and the theme of her becoming more girl-like is increasingly frequently sounded, whether in terms of her needing to do more housework, or in terms of how she behaves (sitting properly, walking nicely, etc.).

As she becomes more "girl-like," the narrator becomes more self-conscious and starts to wonder if she "would be pretty when [she] grew up." At this time the narrator's father brings Flora, a horse, who is healthy, but whose work has been taken over by

machines, to feed the foxes. She has managed to escape her bonds, and is off running through a field that will lead her through a gate and thus beyond the precincts of the farm. The narrator's father perceives that his daughter can more quickly reach the gate out of which the horse will undoubtedly run, and he yells for her to try and get there before the horse. The girl runs off, closely trailed by her little brother.

The narrator reaches the gate, sees the horse running, and without actually making a conscious decision to do so, nevertheless finds herself opening the gate wide for the horse instead of closing it. Only her brother sees this act, because she is out of view of her parent. Her father, Henry Bailey, and her little brother go off in a truck in search of the horse. The girl goes back to the house disconsolately. She does not tell her mother what happened. But over dinner, when the men and boy have returned (and the horse has been caught and shot), Laird tells what happened. The narrator is overcome and begins to cry. She thinks she will be sent away from the table. But instead, the whole incident is dismissed: "'Never mind,' my father said. He spoke with resignation, even good humor, the words which absolved me and dismissed me for good. 'She's only a girl,' he said."

Summary

The unnamed, female narrator of "Boys and Girls," by Alice Munro, begins the short story with her statement, "My father was a fox farmer." She describes his trade in fox furs and the companies he traded with, which gave the family scenic calendars that hung on their kitchen door. She tells of his method for removing the fur from the dead fox, and introduces the hired man, Henry Bailey, as well as her brother, Laird, and her mother. The narrator describes her mother's distaste for the whole pelting process. The narrator describes the overall smell of it all to be homey and comforting. She describes Henry's difficulty with his lungs, and also makes quirks about such things as his voluntary stomach growling and laughter.

The narrator tells how, strangely, they were not afraid of the outside in winter, with the snow and winds howling. Rather, they were afraid of the dark inside. She describes the inside of the room where she and her brother slept every night, and the fears they dealt with as they were trying to sleep. She tells of the rules that every child seems to have about dealing with the dark; such as, the only safe place to be was entirely in bed. They would sing songs and look at the stairwell light and out the window. Once Laird had fallen asleep, the narrator describes how she would tell stories to herself every night before going to sleep herself, involving riding and shooting.

The narrator continues to describe the world of raising foxes, now detailing the buildings that her father built for them to sleep and breed, to feed and water. It was the narrator's job to keep the water dishes filled in the summer. She tells of the names of the foxes, which they got after surviving their first year, and how she named some and how her brother named some. She details the difference between the foxes and pets - even though they had a name now; they were certainly not anybody's pets. Only her father could go in the pens, and they always acted in a very un-petlike manner.

The narrator goes on to tell how she helped cut the long grass by raking the cut portion into piles for her father to throw into the pens. She contrasts her mother and father - her father only talked to her if there was something to say about the job at hand, while her mother could prattle on about everything that entered her mind. Although she is shy of her father, she loves working for him, and is proud when he calls her a hired hand, even though a visiting salesman says, "I thought it was only a girl."

She tells of an occurrence where she sees her mother down at the barn, an unusual sight. She describes her mother's appearance as that of a stereotypical farm wife, with an apron and a kerchief on her head, no time to spend on her appearance. The narrator is given jobs to do in the house in the morning, especially at canning time, and tries to escape the confines of the kitchen for outside work as soon as possible every day. She gets within earshot of her mother and father, and feels betrayed when her mother alludes to Laird as "real help," and voices her expectations of having the narrator help more with the housework. However, she feels proud of her father for his stance as being preoccupied and anxious to get back to work. She expresses her literal love/hate relationship with her mother, since she knows she is love, but feels she has to watch her

back since her mother can no longer be trusted. The narrator is confident that her father will stick up for her.

The narrator is reminded by her father's apron to describe what the foxes get fed, which is horsemeat, gotten from a neighbor's old or sick horse that has been shot and butchered. She depicts how sometimes they would keep a horse for a while before using it for meat, and how when she was eleven, they had two horses named Mack and Flora. She also explains how it seemed that she felt the pressure to become a "girl" more and more from those around her, including, inadvertently, her brother, who was growing up and beginning to become stronger than her. Her grandmother was an especially vocal proponent of how a girl should act, causing the narrator to rebel by acting the exact opposite way.

She begins her illustration of the next spring with a description of letting the horses out of the barn. Henry tells her to say goodbye to Mack, since he was going to be shot that day. The narrator decides she wants to see it done, even though her father tells her to leave. She corrals her brother into going to watch with her, and they sneak into the loft to see out of the knotholes and watch. She watches as they lead an unsuspecting Mack out, and her father aims and shoots him. She watches Mack sway and fall, and kick his legs in the air. She leads Laird away, trying to seem nonchalant about what she had just seen, and she remembers the time she lured Laird onto the top beam in the barn when he was little and watched her parents agonize until they got him down. She notices his pale face, and makes him promise that he won't tell that they watched. She worries that he might have a nightmare, and resolves to put it out of his mind by taking him to see a show.

Soon after it is time for Flora to be shot, and the narrator explains that she doesn't want to see it again. Once was plenty. She explains that she was not exactly horrified by it, she understood the necessity; still, she was a bit repulsed and also a bit ashamed. When it is time, Flora gets away from the men and makes a bid for freedom. The narrator's father yells for her to get the gate shut, because she was nearest and was a fast runner. She gets to the gate, but instead of shutting it, she opens it even more, allowing Flora to go through, without giving it a thought. Laird saw what happened, but her father and Henry did not. She assumed Laird would tell, and is conflicted about why she had done it, and worried about her punishment for disobeying her father.

She goes back to the house and tells her mother what happened. She goes up to her bedroom, and tells of her recent redecoration efforts for her part of the room, trying to make it nicer. She explains that they do not sing anymore at night, since Laird had told her she sounded silly. They are no longer afraid of the dark, and even her stories are changing - she is being rescued, instead of doing the rescuing.

The men and Laird come back with the butchered horsemeat in the truck. When they sit down for dinner, Laird tells on the narrator. Her father is disappointed with her, and the narrator begins to cry. Her father dismisses her with, "She's only a girl."

Analysis

"Boys and Girls" is first and foremost a coming-of-age story, and Munro writes it from the female perspective. The world is full of these types of stories dealing with boys and their achievement over hunting and killing an animal, or winning a race, or a variety of things, but this same type of story dealing with girls is a bit less common. This particular coming-of-age is set against a rather grisly backdrop of the fox-fur trade, and included in between the narrator's vignettes are a number of descriptions of the skinning, housing and feeding of the foxes, as well as her role in such things.

The narrator, who remains unnamed throughout the entire story, is a farm girl through and through. She is most at home doing the outside work, helping her father with the chores of raising foxes and keeping the outdoors in order. She dreads the time she must spend with her mother inside the house, especially in the kitchen. She describes her particular dislike of the canning season, forever chopping up fruit and vegetables in a sweltering kitchen with a distracted mother, counting the seconds until she can steal away out to the barn or the stable or the pens and find her father to ask for a task.

Besides her pleasure at working outside with the men, she also exhibits many of the universal traits of childhood. She and Laird have a little ritual of singing songs before dropping off to sleep, and she particularly relishes her private time to make up stories after Laird is finally asleep. Even her stories are atypical of a little girl - she is putting herself in the role of the dashing and charismatic rescuer, shooting guns and riding horses, instead of being the damsel in distress.

Even at this implied, young age, of around ten or eleven, she is beginning to feel the pressures to act like a "normal" girl. Her mother assumes that as soon as Laird is old enough, he will help the father more, and the narrator will do more work inside the house. Her visiting grandmother drives her crazy with her constant comments on how a proper lady should act. She's not to slam doors, should sit correctly, and not be so nosy or ask improper questions. The visiting salesman assumes she's "only a girl," which foreshadows the end of the story.

She enjoys her time with her father greatly, since he seems to be the only one she can see in her corner. He seems to be proud of her when questioned by the salesman, and allows her to go about her work without any bother from him. In juxtaposition, her mother is growing into her "enemy," since the narrator overhears her talking with her father and assuming she will begin to stay inside more. The narrator feels completely betrayed by this act of supposed treachery, and even assumes the mother is probably bothering her father with these comments while he's trying to work.

This coming-of-age turning point begins when the narrator sneaks up with her brother to witness the horse being shot It's the first time she's ever witnessed such a thing. She is slightly shaken by the event, but at the time, she doesn't seem to be affected too much. Her brother, on the other hand, seems very disturbed, and she worries about him both in a caring way and also to make sure she is safe from being told on. However, this even signals a change in both of them. Laird begins to be more man-like, and is excited

about the next horse that is going to be shot. When the horse gets loose, Laird relishes the chase; the narrator, however, throws open the gate in a sudden, unconscious attempt to save the horse, instead of assisting the men in penning it in, which is what she meant to do. Here is the main catalyst in her growth in to a "real girl." Even after this, she goes to her room, and we see how she has begun to decorate her side in a girly way. They no longer sing at night, and she is not afraid of the dark anymore. She also describes the change in her dreams, another major signal that she is arriving at womanhood no matter how much she tried to prevent it. Instead of doing the rescuing, more and more she is focusing on being rescued, and how she looks and what she is wearing while being rescued. Ironically, this is contrasted with the fact that the life she is being prepared for holds no time for prettifying herself like that - her mother wears aprons and throws her hair in a kerchief, since she has no extra time to do anything else.

Even though she has slowly changed into more of a traditional idea of a girl, which we can now see, the point is driven finally home at the dinner table. Laird tells on her for opening the gate, and she starts to cry, an unusual occurrence. Her father is clearly disgusted with her, and makes the defining statement, "Never mind. She's only a girl." The one person she could rely on for not judging her by her gender is now stating this statement, uttered earlier by the salesman and refuted by her father. With this proclamation, she declines to even protest, and concludes, "Maybe it was true." Her fight against her assumed identity is over, and she has evolved into what it was understood she would become due primarily to the little pressures of the world around her, but also, a little bit, what was inside of her to begin with.

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Characters

Henry Bailey

Henry Bailey is a farmhand. He is like a part of the narrator's family, sharing meals and his life with them. He is mainly a source of entertainment for the children, probably since he does not appear as an authority figure, as the children's parents clearly do. Thus, they can enjoy his teasing of them a great deal, and he, for his part, seems to enjoy thrilling them with his more spectacular accomplishments (like spitting very well).

Father

Like the narrator's mother, the father figure in the story seems a likable, decent and hardworking man. He humors his children, finding ways to praise them that pleases them a great deal. Like his wife, he seems to view a future in which his daughter will eventually leave off helping him to become, exclusively, a help to the mother.

Female Narrator

The character who narrates this story does so with the hindsight of maturity, although she describes events from her childhood and manages to provide the reader with a youthful point of view. She describes the period in her life when her carefree childhood ended, and she began to feel as if she must conform to various expectations. The traditional socialization undergone by middle-class girls at this time was something she resisted, as she perceived that the roles and choices allotted to women were less attractive and various than those allotted to men. However, regardless of this resistance, she describes how she gradually capitulated to accept this socialization. The narrator is like the lively, frisky horse Flora in the story, a living thing with energy and will that is finally entrapped and used by forces greater than herself.

Laird

Laird is the narrator's younger brother, a seemingly sweet little boy whose helplessness is, at first, contrasted to the narrator's greater ability to be of help to her mother and father in the house and on the fox farm. However, as the story progresses, this image of babyishness falls away as it becomes clear that Laird will be the one to take the narrator's place at their father's side, a position the young narrator hoped would always belong to her. By the end of the story Laird has been taken into the company of men, and his sister, the narrator, has been relegated to the ranks of being "only a girl."

Mother

The narrator's mother seems to be an exemplary woman, one who fulfills the duties of a homemaker with energy and verve. The portion of the story that describes what goes on inside the farm house shows her putting in a day's work that matches the energies of the men working outside. She looks forward to the day when her daughter will be older and so able to relieve more of her labor's burden. She seems to enjoy the company of her daughter; the narrator tells us that she talks freely about her past and things in general when they are working together.

Themes

In some respects, "Boys and Girls" is a classic coming of age tale. Most societies have either cultural narratives or cultural rituals that bespeak the end of childhood and the entry into adulthood. The way that this shift in a boy or girl's life is depicted will tell a great deal about the values of a particular culture. If the tale is about a boy who goes on his first hunting expedition, then the reader surmises that bravery is paramount to what makes a boy a man in that society. What, then, marks the transition from girlhood to young womanhood? It is this problem that Munro takes on in "Boys and Girls." Interestingly, Munro first depicts the young girl narrator defining herself like a boy seemingly would do. She thinks up stories at night in which she is a hero who is brave and saves other people from peril. However, when this girl begins to think of herself as a gendered person, she no longer thinks in terms of heroic qualities that will have some larger social effect, but instead begins to focus on her person itself (her relative beauty or plainness). Will she be "pretty," she wonders? Will a certain "fancy" material for a dress enhance her looks? Coming of age for a young girl at the historical time of this story, then, seems to rest on the future potential of this girl's ability to attract men, and thus her marriage ability. Bravery and independence, those qualities that will lead persons to successfully make their public and professional way in the world can be contrasted to this more private and personal mode of self-valuation. Thus, when a woman writer takes on the problem of female coming-of-age as it might have occurred during the first half of this century, what ensues is a parable about how the girl retreats from the public and enwraps herself in the space of private worries.

Style

Allusion

When a writer makes an "allusion" within a story, he or she refers to a well-known event or thing that is supposed to conjure up associations that are relevant to what is going on in the story. In saying that her father's favorite book is *Robinson Crusoe*, Munro, via the narrator, has made an important allusion in her story. This novel by Daniel Defoe is about a man who, on a colonial venture from England to South America, is shipwrecked and becomes the only survivor washed up on an island off the South American coast. Finding he cannot build a seaworthy vessel to contend with the surrounding coast and sea with the implements he has at his disposal (which he either saves from the sunken ship or makes himself), Crusoe goes about building himself a home and a farm and taming and grooming his environment to his purposes. He spends many years alone. Eventually, he witnesses a group of South American Indians land on his island and prepare to kill a hostage from another tribe they have taken in war. Crusoe saves this unfortunate Indian and then the book goes on to depict an idealized relation between the two men in which the Indian, in profound gratitude, willingly and happily submits to Crusoe and becomes his slave. Crusoe dubs the Indian "Friday" to commemorate the day he saved him, and the day he received a companion, for he has been very lonely. Contemporary critics, not surprisingly, have read this last portion of De-foe's book as the dreamy wishes of a European man who imagined that the natives of colonized lands greeted their demise or bondage with little dismay or resentment. Like the fur company's calendar, Defoe's book idealizes the history of colonialism, to the clear benefit of those who had the upper hand. By linking this book to her father within a story that contests women's secondary status to men, Munro aligns Crusoe to her father and herself to Friday. Like Crusoe, she suggests, her father does not recognize that she does not accept her inferior social status.

Foreshadowing

In a story about a young girl's feelings about being trapped into a position she is not looking forward to, the subplot concerning the two horses bought to be used for fodder is an instance of foreshadowing. Although any reader will understand that the success of the fox farm depends upon the sacrifice of these two animals, Munro's attention to Flora's attempt to run away nevertheless provokes feelings of pity for the animal whose life will end while it is in its prime. The inevitability and unpleasantness of this animal's fate foreshadows the fate of the girl protagonist. No matter how hard she tries to resist her future, she is destined to lose to forces greater than herself.

Subplot

The story of the two horses comprises a subplot within the larger story that is "Boys and Girls." Subplots usually serve a specific function in a story. They may provide a counterpoint to the larger plot, outlining a sub-story that contradicts or parodies the main goings-on, or, as in the case of this subplot, they may serve to underscore the main events. The horses' fate is determined and dismal, and so is the fate and future of the girl narrator. Munro's clever interweaving of the larger plot and this subplot makes for a tightly constructed and powerful ending to the story.

Historical Context

The year the short story collection *Dance of the Happy Shades,* which includes "Boys and Girls" was published, 1968, was also the year that Pierre Elliot Trudeau became Prime Minister of Canada. Eloquent, forward-looking, and energetic, this prime minister's entry into office represented the forces and collective will of a decade of major social change. His winning of this highest office represented the solidification of substantial changes in mores and beliefs that so clearly distinguishes the latter half of the twentieth-century from the earlier half. Before becoming Prime Minister, Trudeau was the Minister of Justice, in which office he liberalized laws on abortion, birth control, divorce, and homosexuality. The late 1950s, but especially the 1960s, was a time in Canada (as it was in the United States and Europe as well) when various social movements changed the face of western society. Many of these social movements pertained directly to the status and freedoms of women within society, and thus "Boys and Girls" is very much a story of its time, as it represents the creative work of a woman writer who sympathizes with those changes in belief that served to expand women's social choices.

Critical Overview

Dance of the Happy Shades, the collection of short stories in which "Boys and Girls" appeared, was published in 1968. The novel *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971) soon followed, and a second collection of stories entitled *Something I've Been Meaning To Tell You* was published in 1974. In an essay written in 1978 in which these three books were discussed, critic Hallward Dahlie said Munro is "a writer who has quietly and firmly established herself over the past decade." To say that Munro gained this reputation "quietly and firmly" seems an apt estimation. From the start, Munro's critics approached her writing as that which deserved careful and serious consideration, whether their praise was highly favorable or more measured in its admiration. Her fiction has inspired a large and highly respectable body of scholarly criticism. By the time *Dance of the Happy Shades* was published, Munro had spent many years honing her talent. Thus, when this collection appeared, it was the work of a writer skilled and confident in her talents, talents that well justified the admiration they inspired. So, even if critic Frederick Busch found Munro's art in her first collection somewhat lacking in "the thrilling economy, the poetry that makes the form [the short story] so valuable," he nevertheless acknowledged that they are stories "you have to call well-made." Most critics, however, greeted *Dance of the Happy Shades* like Martin Levin did. In Levin's review in the *New York Times Book Review*, he said the "short story is alive and well in Canada"; the "15 tales . . . originate like fresh winds from the north."

That Munro deserves this solid place among writers is underscored in an essay written by Rae McCarthy MacDonald in which the critic asserted that "Munro's work bears the marks of a distinctive, vital, and unifying vision." According to MacDonald, this vision is quite somber. Noting that so many of Munro's stories feature minor characters who are "eccentrics, criminals, and the fatally ill," MacDonald suggested that these marginal characters "work as a symbol or externalization of the suffering and deformity of the apparently healthy and adjusted characters." However, other critics differ as to the bleakness of Munro's vision. For instance, while Hallvard Dahlie also noted a pervasiveness of "existential terror or desperation" in her fiction, this "desperation" is, Dahlie suggested, finally offset by a concurrent development of a sense of "existential possibility within a total vision that is much closer to faith rather than despair." Or, from the point of view of the famous novelist and short story writer Joyce Carol Oates, Munro's fiction is described as being so true to its subjects that it somehow "celebrate[s]" them; in Munro's fiction, said Oates, there is a "wonderful variety of people . . . [whom] we always want to know more about." That more critics tend to this latter view is perhaps because, as Kildare Dobbs recorded, so many of her stories "move quietly to their modest epiphanies or moral insights." Certainly, stories like "Walker Brothers Cowboy" or "Dance of the Happy Shades" (both from *Dance of the Happy Shades*) do work toward these deeply touching resolutions of sudden profound insight and emotional purgation ("epiphanies"), and they do also seem to capture what is most impressive about Munro's art. Munro's solid position within the contemporary canon of English language fiction is shown by the many essays and books that have been written about her fiction, such as Robert Thacker's bibliography of Munro criticism,

Alice Munro: An Annotated Bibliography, and E. D. Blodgett's book, *Alice Munro,* which explores the complexity of Munro's "subtly self-aware manner of narration."

Criticism

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

Critical Essay #1

Dell'Amico is a doctoral candidate in the program of Literatures in English at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. She specializes in the twentieth-century novel. The essay "Literature and Social History" discusses the connection between fiction and history, generally, and the historical interest of Alice Munro's "Boys and Girls" in particular.

The word "literature" means different things to different people. Lately, the word is used to mean any type of written material, from government and business reports, to fiction and poetry, to histories and letters. Then, within the category of literature, it is possible to make a distinction between fictive literatures (novels, short stories, poetry) versus factual types of writing, like histories. Yet, the distinction between fact and fiction is not as definite as the opposing words suggest. For example, a book of history is a compilation of facts, but these facts must be interpreted and interwoven into a continuous story by the writer. There is a bit of the "story" in "hi-story," as these facts appear within a form of literature that is a narrative (about the past). Or, in terms of fiction like Munro's which places the reader within a recognizable time and place, while it is clearly imaginative work, it is also a historical document of sorts, a place to find out how people lived and what they thought and wished or dreamed. It may not be history in a strictly technical sense, but it can be consulted for historical information. Of course, it is this imaginative aspect of art that creates the possibility for fiction to be more than, or different than, history. Comments such as the following (found on a jacket of one edition of *Dance of the Happy Shades*), points to this expectation; the writer asserts: "Alice Munro's short stories probe the interior life of ordinary people in the small towns and farms of southwestern Ontario. The setting may be Canadian—the themes are universal: the joys and cruelties of love, the self-discovery of adolescence, [and so on]...."

What this critic's words suggest is that Munro's work is as good as it is precisely because it is more than history, more than just a document of rural Canadian lifestyles. It is more because it tells us something about ourselves as human beings ("interior life"), and so it transcends time and history and thus achieves the status of the "universal." Yet, despite this, some stories that are widely appreciated by readers and critics are valued not simply for their universality, or their humanity, but also because they seem to capture and document a particularly significant moment in social or historical time. "Boys and Girls" is one of these stories, a story that is important not only for its being "good art," but also for its social or historical significance. History and fiction, two sub-types in the larger category of Literature, cannot be wholly distinguished or disassociated from each other. Some stories are important because they record major moments in a culture's social history, and "Boys and Girls" is one of these stories.

The title of this story points to the specific social issue which it is concerned with: the difference between boys and girls, or women and men, and the way that many women during this century are concerned with women's rights. The later twentieth-century is distinguished for its women's movement, an on-going event that has shaped the century

and the people who have lived it. Most twentieth-century writers take up this issue somewhere in their work, whether directly or more peripherally, as authors write, in part, to engage or come to terms with their time and place. This ability to address the social and historical is partly what makes a writer relevant. And what Munro specifically offers the reader in "Boys and Girls" is insight into what Kildare Dobbs refers to as "the ideology of the women's movement." By ideology, Dobbs means the set of beliefs that underpin the aspirations of feminists who, during this century, wished to expand (and continue to consolidate and further) the social opportunities of women.

Obviously, one short story cannot pack in the entire (and in fact very diverse) feminist platform. Nevertheless, what this story does do is dramatize certain basic feminist ideas, and it does so quite effectively. Since the notion that a woman might move beyond the home necessitates the notion that women are not genetically programmed, as it were, to be only effective in the home, one thing that feminists argue is that desiring a traditional role is often the result of training or socialization, and not necessarily the result of nature ("nature versus nurture," as the debate is often called). That is, if girls are not discouraged, then they might very well chose a profession which, before the women's movement, was thought solely appropriate for a man. This basic premise is presented cogently by Munro; the narrator thinks: "The word girl had formerly seemed to me innocent and unburdened, like the word child; now it appeared that it was no such thing. A girl was not, as I had supposed, simply what I was; it was what I had to become." By saying that a girl is something she must "become," Munro puts forward the idea that this development is in no way natural, but rather will be the result of training or socialization. Soon after this realization, the narrator notices how it is she is urged "to become" a girl, or how the socialization proceeds:

My grandmother came to stay with us for a few weeks and I heard other things. "Girls don't slam doors like that." "Girls keep their knees together when they sit down." And, worse still, when I asked some questions, "That's none of girls' business." I continued to slam doors and sit as awkwardly as possible, thinking that by such measures I kept myself free.

What is understood from passages such as the ones above is that there is not much difference in behavior between the sexes if they are left to their own devices. However, figures in positions of authority, such as the grandmother, take it upon themselves to train the sexes in appropriate sex-specific behaviors. Judging from the above, the training of girls concentrates on making them into beings who demonstrate physical self-containment and modesty (no slamming doors; sitting demurely). And beside behavior restrictions, there is the training of girls in their proper interests, "girls' business."

Clearly, this training would not be resisted so strongly by the narrator if this differentiation of the sexes did not involve a simultaneous devaluation of "girls' business," which is a second major feminist issue. That is, it is not simply that girls are trained to be specific types of persons, but also that the person they are to become is considered, socially, less important than a man. Munro develops this idea in scenes such as the following:

One time a feed salesman came down into the pens to talk to him [the father] and my father said, "Like to have you meet my new hired man." I turned away and raked furiously, red in the face with pleasure. "Could of fooled me," said the salesman. "I thought it was only a girl."

Or, at the end of the story, when it has become known that the narrator let the horse out of the field purposefully: "'Never mind,' my father said. He spoke with resignation, even good humor, the words which absolved and dismissed me for good. 'She's only a girl,' he said." What this pointed repetition of the phrase "only a girl" points to is precisely this societal notion that girls and women are considered less significant than men. The narrator is so deeply pleased by being referred to teasingly as a "new hired man" because she is quite aware that being a man is better than being "only" a girl or woman. She resists her future role as mother's helper in the story because her pride rebels against being considered second to anybody.

Feminists combat this unfortunate hierarchy in two ways. One, they insist that traditional woman's work is valuable, and must be recognized for how it keeps society going. In "Boys and Girls," this idea comes across in the way that Munro depicts her mother as constantly busy and very hardworking. She may be doing housework, but if she did not, the family would fall apart. The reason why this hierarchy came about, feminists suggest, is because men's work is more public, and women's more private, and since it takes place in the home it is less visible and thus has gone unacknowledged and undervalued. Also, another way that feminists work toward the changing of women's secondary social status is to insist that, if given the chance or choice, women could do as well as men in the more public professions. By letting women move beyond the home, it will be seen how they can compete with men and thus be seen as their social equals. Further, feminists argue that some women have talents specifically matched to public professions, and that it would be a shame to waste these talents by forcing them to remain in the home. Indeed, as an aspiring writer in an era before women's advancement was as consolidated as it is today, Munro herself voiced just such an observation in an interview. On the farm, Munro observed, "there is a sexual polarity." And, she adds "you are a bit out of luck if you don't have the talents for the sexual role that you've been born into." Of herself she says, "I'm not good at hooking rugs and making quilts and things like that, so I would have had a very rough time in this life."

Luckily for Munro, she was born when there had been enough advancement of women in the realm of the arts that it was possible for her to develop her true talent, which was to be a writer and artist. However, since these advancements took so long to achieve, and were majorly advanced in the very decades that she came of age as an artist, it is not surprising that some of her stories, like "Boys and Girls," records this social issue of women's rights. Literature or fiction is not conceived of in a vacuum, rather it arises from the experiences of real men and women living in history. For this reason, it is misguided to assume that art always transcends time and place. Rather, much of the most respected fiction in the history of literature is so respected precisely because it was able to grasp and communicate the social and historical reality of its time and place.

Source: Carol Dell'Amico, "Literature and Social History," in *Short Stories for Students,* The Gale Group, 1999.

Critical Essay #2

Korb has a master's degree in English literature and creative writing and has written for a wide variety of educational publishers. In the following essay, she discusses how the narrator of "Boys and Girls" unwittingly accepts being a girl.

Although Alice Munro knew from the time she was 12 years old that she wanted to be a writer, her first collection of short stories was not published until 1968, when Munro was well into her adulthood. Since then, however, she has remained one of Canada's top authors, and her work has crossed the world's boundaries; her writing has been translated into 14 languages and her works are widely anthologized. Her writing often features the world she knows best, the Depression-era southwestern Ontario of her early years. In *Dance of the Happy Shades*, from which the story "Boys and Girls" is taken, Munro presents the hardscrabble childhood of her youth. Critics and readers responded to this collection positively, noting her evocation of place as well as her understanding and depiction of the gender roles that characterized the time period. For this collection she won the prestigious Governor's General Award, an honor that would be bestowed upon her several times.

"Boys and Girls" may be termed a rite-of-passage story, for it tells of a significant event that helps one girl to recognize and accept the womanhood that is her future. The 11-year-old narrator lives on her family's fox farm. For years she has helped out her father, but that winter she realizes that her mother is expecting her to become more of a "girl"—working in the house, for instance, instead of in the fox pens. The narrator resists such efforts at transformation. However, when her father intends to kill a mare in order to feed the foxes, with no forethought the girl frees the panicked horse. The girl is not surprised to later learn that her father has recaptured and killed the mare. What does surprise her, however, is that he is not angry with her transgression; after all, as he says, "'She's only a girl.'" And perhaps also surprising to the girl is her own reaction to his statement: "I didn't protest that, even in my heart. Maybe it was true."

One of the most striking features of the story is Munro's presentation of how the ideas suggested by "boy" and "girl" come into opposition; this opposition is reflected in all facets of the narrator's world. Still, the story slowly builds to this conclusion, for as it begins, the narrator and her younger brother, Laird, have both firmly allied themselves with their father; they spend their time watching their father work, skinning the foxes. Their mother, however—the homemaker—dislikes this bloody business.

Clearly, the narrator has given thought to the differing roles of men and women and has chosen to identify herself with the male sphere. She sees the inside of the house as her mother's territory, a territory she does not care to inhabit. Outside the house is the real world, the world of foxes and commerce and vibrancy. Even her bedroom, part of the inside house, is not a sanctuary but instead an "unfinished" space she shares with her brother. Marlene Goldman has written that this space remains "undifferentiated," implying the same state in the children—that they have not yet accepted their respective labels of "girl" or "boy." The children are so alike they even share the same fear: "*inside*,

the room where we slept," instead of outside, with its chilling winter. At the beginning of the story, it is the outside world in which the girl participates. She has a summer job of giving the foxes water with the "real watering can, her father's," while Laird only carries a "little cream and green gardening can, filled too full and knocking against his legs and slopping water on his canvas shoes." The girl's subtle boast emphasizes her belief that she has access to the male tools and thus the male identity. The girl compares working side-by-side with her father to working in the house with her mother. Her father remains silent, while her mother often would tell her stories. The girl, however, gets a "feeling of pride" working with her father that she lacks with her mother. Clearly, housework and "women's work" do not have the same value as the male, outside work. She feels her role on the farm is assured—her father even refers to her when speaking to a feed salesman as "'my new hired man,'" which makes her "red in the face with pleasure."

The girl has no expectations that her daily life will change. By this point she has fully embraced the male identity, even down to the stories she tells herself at night in which she plays a rescuing hero and then rides down the main street on a horse to receive the townspeople's gratitude, even though the only person to ever do so is the man who plays King Billy during the town's yearly parade, itself a state of make-believe. One day, however, she sees her mother by the barn. This itself is the first sign that something is amiss, for "[I]t was an odd thing to see my mother down at the barn. She did not often come out of the house unless it was to do something—hang out the wash or dig potatoes in the garden." The girl overhears part of her mother's words—"And then I can use her more in the house, . . . It's not like I had a girl in the family at all." Despite this conversation, the narrator does not expect anything to change. As she puts it, "Who could imagine Laird doing my work . . . It showed how little my mother knew about the way things really were." Her statement shows that not only does she believe her help to be indispensable to her father, but that, because of her male work, she believes herself to be superior to her mother—more knowledgeable and more useful. Her acknowledgment that "I did not expect my father to pay any attention" to her mother's words further shows that she has placed herself on an equal level with her father; as the only family representatives of the male identity, they share the secrets of the farm; her mother, trapped in the house and in her female body, remains ignorant.

Despite her protestations, at this point the girl enters into a new stage, one in which she is no longer able to securely latch on to her chosen identity. For throughout the winter she hears "a great deal more on the theme" and admits, "I no longer felt safe . . . The word *girl* had formerly sounded to me innocent and unburdened, like the word *child*; now it appeared it was no such thing. A girl was not, as I had supposed, simply what I was; it was what I was to become." That winter other challenges to the girl's right to occupy the male sphere are launched. As Goldman points out, with her grandmother's visit, the narrator learns lessons about how girls are expected to come under societal control: girls don't slam doors, girls keep their knees together when they sit down, and the worst of all, in response to a question, "'That's none of girls' business.'"

To what extent these lessons influence the narrator is unknown to the reader at this point. Only later does the reader learn that the girl has taken to "standing in front of the mirror combing my hair and wondering if I would be pretty when I grew up." The stories

she tells herself at night have changed, too; although they start out the same, they switch so that she no longer does the rescuing but suddenly a male figure is rescuing *her*. Her belongings have similarly taken on the trappings of femininity: old lace curtains as a bedspread, a dressing table with a skirt. She also has grown dissatisfied with the bedroom she shares with Laird. What she had previously presented as a common space, where the two siblings cheerfully engaged in storytelling and singing, she now plans to divide with a barricade. When this transformation happens is unknown to the reader, but clearly it has been building up before her fateful encounter with Flora. In fact, it is likely that the narrator deliberately withheld this information from the reader, mirroring the way she has kept herself from understanding the true meaning of her actions. The narrator's ability to hide pertinent details has already been demonstrated in her exclusion of how her father feeds the foxes—"I have forgotten to say what the foxes were fed. My father's bloody apron reminded me." That the story opens with the dead, bloody bodies of the fox shows that the narrator has left out this detail in an attempt to present her favored father in the best light possible.

The spring began as any other spring. Yet, as her father prepares to kill Flora, a mare he has purchased with the intention of feeding her to the foxes, the girl undergoes a drastic transformation, particularly so in comparison to her reaction at the killing of another horse a short time before. When that horse was killed, the girl's legs were a "little shaky," but she felt "all right" after going to the movies that afternoon.

The girl has already identified herself to some extent with Flora, a high-strung horse, for Flora, like the girl and even the foxes, experiences confinement. Clearly, the structure and description of the farm itself reinforce such ideas of entrapment. The foxes, which the girl recognizes as beautiful but hostile, live in a "world my father had made for them." She describes the fox pens, which Goldman points out are "spaces in which bodies are confined and controlled," as bordering the streets of a town; inside the pens the foxes restlessly "prowled up and down," much as Flora, when let out of the barn, "trotted up and down and reared at the fences, clattering her hooves against the rails." Goldman further comments on the house and the farm: the dark, hot kitchen that "imprisons" the mother and threatens the narrator; the fields that surround the farm and the gates that restrict traffic are an "enlarged version of the pen"; even the town itself is an "inescapable enclosure."

When Flora is brought out of the barn to be killed, the girl states, "It was exciting to see her running, whinnying, going up on her hind legs, prancing and threatening like a horse in a Western movie, an unbroken ranch horse, though she was just an old driver, an old sorrel mare." The horse brings to life the narrator's fantasies, though now generally rejected, of the female striking against imposed societal expectations and becoming a creature strong in its own right. Flora breaks away into a meadow where a gate has been left open. The girl's father shouts to her to shut the gate. It is at this moment that the girl breaks irrevocably from her self-imposed male-identified position. Her desire to free the female horse is stronger than her desire to please her father. She knows however, that the horse will be recaptured, and that freedom is only an illusion. For the first time in her life, she disobeys her father. "Instead of shutting the gate," she recounts, "I opened it as wide as I could. I did not make any decision to do this, it was just what I

did." While the girl returns to the house—"inside"—her younger brother becomes a man; he remains "outside" and goes along with the men to track down and catch Flora. This is the point at which the narrator admits to the changes that she has been undergoing; she opens her heart up to the truth. She has become a "girl."

Marlene Goldman calls "Boys and Girls" a "narrative which highlights the almost invisible societal forces which shape children." By the end of the story, the sister and brother have firmly stepped into the roles that society has extended to them. "Boys and Girls" also introduces two themes that reappear in Munro's writing: the burden of femininity and the women's need to break free.

Source: Rena Korb, "A Rite of Passage," in *Short Stories for Students,* The Gale Group, 1999.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, Goldman looks at the theme of societal forces that shape children into adults, especially the different things expected of boys and girls, found in Munro's "Boys and Girls." She also looks at the very different worlds—outside and inside, the male sphere and the female sphere—described by Munro in the story.

"My father was a fox farmer." So begins Alice Munro's short story "Boys and Girls," a narrative which highlights the almost invisible societal forces which shape children, in this case, the narrator and her brother Laird, into gendered adults. There is no doubt that males and females are biologically distinct at birth. Yet the behaviours and roles ascribed to each sex on the basis of this biological distinction are not natural. In this study, then, when I speak of gender, I refer not to sex, but to this set of prescribed behaviours.

Children, as the text clearly illustrates, do not evolve naturally into gendered adults. Instead, the construction of gendered subjects constitutes a form of production. Yet unlike other systems of production, the mechanisms which assist in the creation of gendered adults remain invisible; they seem natural, and for this reason they are taken for granted.

One such "invisible" mechanism, central to the production of gendered adults, involves the division and control of space. In "Boys and Girls," spatial divisions and the control of space within the home and on the farm are emphasized by a narrator still young enough to remark upon details which the adults ignore. As a result of the narrator's relatively innocent and inquisitive perspective, the reader can appreciate how the division of space facilitates two seemingly disparate systems of production: farming and the construction of gendered adults.

As a farmer, the father cultivates wild animals for the purpose of consumption. As the narrator explains, he "raised silver foxes in pens." The word "raised" refers to silver foxes, but the term offers more than this strictly referential meaning. It can also be understood within the familial context: people often speak of raising children. The plurality of the word opens the text to diverse readings—readings which introduce the possibility of a correspondence between the two systems of production.

In particular, the father raises the foxes in "pens"—spaces in which bodies are confined and controlled. As the narrator explains, he took great pains to build a miniature city for his captives: "alive, the foxes inhabited a world my father made for them." Moreover, the pens resembled a medieval town "padlocked at night." This image of the enclosure and the concomitant distinction between inside and outside (indoor and outdoor) recur throughout the text.

Early on, the house takes on the properties of the pen. The dark, hot, stifling kitchen imprisons the narrator's mother and threatens to imprison the narrator. Similarly, the fields surrounding the farm and the gates, which restrict traffic, become an enlarged

version of the pen. Finally, the town itself and the outlying farms are conceived of in terms of an inescapable enclosure. As a result of these replications of the enclosure, the father's occupation and his role in establishing and supervising the boundaries between inside and outside take on greater significance and begin to reflect a far more pervasive cultural project.

The Marxist critic Ivan Illich sheds light on the nature of this project when he suggests that the capacity to enclose, essentially a male privilege, was the key factor responsible for the emergence of industrial society and wage work as we know it today. Illich states that the economic division of labor into a productive and a non-productive kind was pioneered and first enforced through "the domestic enclosure of women." As he explains, men became the "wardens of their domestic women." Thus, the narrator's father, in his capacity as guardian and gate-keeper penning in the bodies, performs a task which supports industrial society and wage work, and ultimately, capitalist production.

In addition to enclosing the foxes, the father in "Boys and Girls" also controls a specific space within the home. When not working out of doors, he carries out his activities in the cellar, a room which is white-washed and lit by a hundred-watt bulb. By definition, white-wash is "a solution of quicklime or of whiting and size for brushing over walls and ceilings to give a clean appearance." Figuratively speaking, "white washing" suggests clearing "a person or his memory of imputation or [clearing] someone's reputation." In this case, the presence of white-wash in the male domain suggests that an attempt is made to "give something a clean appearance"—something which may be fundamentally unclean.

Furthermore, the intense light which illuminates the space also reflects the father's desire to control or, more specifically, to manipulate one's impression of his territory. In his book *Power/Knowledge,* Foucault studies the use of light in various structures in terms of the desire to maintain an arbitrary, yet powerful force. He concludes that "a form of power whose main instance is that of opinion will refuse to tolerate areas of darkness." Thus the white-wash and the bright lights in the cellar effectively undermine the seeming neutrality of the father and his activities.

Initially, although sensitive to the details of the procedure, the narrator takes it for granted that the father's work—the raising of foxes—is an ideologically neutral activity, one without agency. It simply "happens" in the fall and early winter that he "killed and skinned and sold their pelts to the Hudson's Bay Co." But the commercial basis of the slaying undercuts any claims to neutrality. The father's occupation is enmeshed in a cultural discourse which imposes specific views upon the world.

The narrator, however, remains unaware of the implications of her father's activities for some time. She feels safe in the male sphere and enjoys the "warm, safe, brightly lit downstairs world." She feels threatened, not by the male domain or the icy winter world outside, but by the "inside," the "unfinished," upper portion of the house, the bedroom which she shares with her brother Laird. Unlike the clearly delineated male territory below, the bedroom remains undifferentiated. Neither male nor female, the space is

fraught with danger. Poorly lit, the room specifically threatens their link with the male domain. In the darkness, the children must fix their eyes "on the faint light coming up the stairwell" in order to retain their connection with the male sphere.

The unfinished state of the room can be taken as an image of the undifferentiated consciousness of the children. Laird has not yet adopted a gender role associated with the father. Nor has the narrator been forced to sever her connection to the father and take up an identity aligned with the mother. This hypothesis concerning her male orientation gains support from the nature of her nocturnal fantasies.

In the stories she tells herself late at night, she casts herself into the role of heroic subject. As male savior, she rescues people from a bombed building, shoots rabid wolves and rides "a fine horse spiritedly down the main streets." Yet nobody except a *male,* "King Billy," ever rode a horse down the street. Before her subjectivity has been constituted, her body fought over and conquered, these dreams of male heroism seem attainable.

By the end of the story, however, her gender role has been established. This psychic division is replicated on the level of a spatial division, signalling the children's acquisition of gendered subjectivity. The bedroom is divided into two halves—one for the boy, the other, for the girl. Even the stories the narrator tells herself have altered. The plots start off in the old way, but then "things would change around, and instead, somebody would be rescuing me." No longer the valiant hero, she becomes the victim in need of rescue.

Further proof of the narrator's initial alignment with the father lies in her assurance that she is his "hired man." During the day, rather than help her mother in the house—a job she abhors—she assists her father in looking after his captives. While watering the foxes, secure in her position, she looks scornfully upon her little brother's efforts to assist. Too small to handle adult tools, Laird toddles along with his pitiful gardening can—an overtly phallic object. In boasting that she "had the real watering can, my father's," the narrator further emphasizes her belief that she has access, not to the father's actual member, but to the privileged symbolic system aligned with the phallus.

By aligning herself with her father, the narrator thus accrues a measure of the status associated with the set of signifiers which attend the phallus, including "law," "money," "power," "knowledge," "plentitude," "authoritative-vision," etc.

As a result of this access to a particular set of signifiers, her relationship with her father differs dramatically from the connection she has with her mother. The contrast can be best understood within the inside/outside paradigm. Father and daughter engage in the context of outer space—space that is "structured, interpreted and rendered meaningful by social discourse produced by the system of intellectual and cultural traditions." The narrator literally joins her father on the outside (the out of doors) where they do work that is "ritualistically important."

The relationship the narrator has with her mother, on the other hand, contrasts sharply with the silent, disciplined relationship she has with her father. Once again, to use the

inside/outside paradigm, the association between mother and daughter, which occurs within the house, reflects the qualities of "inner" space. Louise Forsyth explains that "inner" space is also the realm of "the imaginary, of spirituality, of memory." The narrator enters this space when she tells herself stories, and the mother, in sharing her memories with her daughter, also enters this space.

The mother does not belong to the powerful ruling elite, the patriarchy. Thus, she cannot control her daughter by utilizing the strategy available to the male. Whereas work done out of doors is "ritualistically important" or *real,* work performed indoors is "endless, dreary and peculiarly depressing." For this reason, the mother treats her daughter as a fellow prisoner and their association is characterized by speech and openness.

At bottom, the separation between inner and outer space is arbitrary. No undisputed boundary separates inside from outside or nature from culture, unless, as Derrida argues, "it is granted that the division between exterior and interior passes through the interior of the interior or the exterior of the exterior." That is to say, the supposed border which divides the space must either pass through the "inside" or the "outside."

While the separation between inside and outside may be arbitrary, these divisions are upheld by the virtually intractable force of opinion and tradition. Moreover, as we shall see, the placement of specific objects within either space affords a tremendous amount of cultural information concerning power relations. For instance, in exchange for the pelts, the family receives calendars. As the narrator explains, the Hudson's Bay company or the Montreal Fur Traders supplied them with "heroic calendars to hang on both sides of the kitchen door." At first, in the context of the discourse of production, calendars seem out of place. Why does the narrator not refer to the receipt of a more logical item such as money? Yet upon closer examination, calendars prove to be an apt symbol, one which, like the word "raised," underscores a connection between the father's economic occupation as a farmer and his role as a producer of gendered subjects.

For one thing, the placement of the calendars on *both* sides of the kitchen door links the father's work, the production of animals, to the domestic sphere (the kitchen being the area within the home most closely connected to females). Secondly, mimicking the device of *mise en abîme* (the story which tells a story about telling a story, ad infinitum), the calendars not only "speak" as a result of their placement on the kitchen door, but they also tell a story by way of their depiction of the colonization in the norther wilderness.

The calendars depict nature being conquered by male adventurers in all their plumed flag-planting majesty: territory is claimed and controlled. This depiction, in turn, recalls culture's age-old project of mastery over nature. Furthermore, the opposition between culture and nature illustrated by the calendar is closely aligned to a more general, cultural opposition between male and female.

Derrida argues that throughout history nature has been opposed to a chain of cultural institutions. Moreover, as Derrida and other critics have pointed out, these institutions

have been traditionally aligned with the male, while the realm of the natural has been long associated with the female. Thus, by placing the calendars on both sides of the kitchen door, the aperture of the female domain, and by supplementing this with an illustration of the colonization of the wilderness, the calendars underscore the correspondence between the colonization of nature and the colonization of gendered subjects—specifically female subjects.

Finally, the natives within the calendar illustration, who bend their backs to the portage, have, like the foxes, been co-opted into the cultural project. Both foxes and natives exemplify bodies named by the discourse of production. The farmer transforms the foxes into "pelts" just as the early explorers transform the indigenous people into "savages" by imposing limited interpretations of their beings upon them. Both farmer and explorer reduce bodies, fragment them into raw material and conscript them into the service of production.

Thus the seemingly insignificant detail of the placement of the calendar with its depiction of the colonization of the wilderness provides a diachronic perspective of the farmer's activities—a perspective which enables one to see that the enclosure of the foxes' bodies and the bodies of the other family members (who also "inhabit a world . . . [their] father made for them"), replicates our forefather's enclosure of the feminine wilderness. Moreover, the calendar solidifies the connection, first established through the use of the word "raising," between the two types of production: farming and the raising of gendered adults.

Slowly but surely, as a result of these spatial arrangements, the narrator's position on the outside—her tenuous alignment with the male—is threatened. The first threat is delivered by the father's hired hand, Henry Bailey. After the foxes are skinned, Bailey takes a sackful of their bloody bodies and swipes at the narrator, saying "Christmas present." This gesture subtly suggests a connection between the narrators current fate and that of the foxes. Throughout the story, Bailey relishes the prospect of the narrator's acquisition of her gender role with its concomitant enforcement of subjugation to the male. When he comes across the narrator and her brother fighting, Bailey laughs again, saying, "Oh, that there Laird's gonna show you, one of these days!"

Yet another threat arrives in the form of a feed salesman. The father introduces his daughter to the salesman as a hired man. The salesman responds according to the dictates of culture: no female is allowed on the outside. He reacts to the threat of her presence by treating the father's remark as a joke: "could of fooled me," he says, "I thought it was only a girl."

Other challenges to the narrator's connection to the father and her right to occupy the male "outside" space are launched from within the household itself. Female family members begin to coerce the narrator. Efforts to restrict her behavior occur at every level of existence. For example, her grandmother tells her, "girls don't slam doors like that" (control of her movement through space); "girls keep their knees together when they sit down" (control of the body); and when she asks a question, she is told "that's none of girls' business" (control of consciousness itself).

In a similar bid for control, the narrator's mother confronts the father in front of the barn one fall evening, demanding that he relinquish his right to the girl's labour. The mother explains that, according to his law, the child should remain with her inside the house. In confronting the father at the barn, the mother transgresses the culturally established boundary between inside and outside. The narrator remarks on the scandal, noting how unusual it was to see her mother down at the barn. From her privileged, male-vantage point, the narrator looks on her mother in the same way she looks on the foxes. The narrator does not comprehend that the hostility she sees in the foxes' "malevolent faces" is a response to their enforced captivity. Similarly, her mother's behaviour is interpreted, not as an expression of frustration and disappointment, or loneliness, but as a manifestation of innate wickedness and petty tyranny.

Ultimately, the narrator gives way to the variety of pressures directed at her. Once again, the two systems of production are shown to be linked: at the same time as the horses are butchered, the children's gender roles are fixed. The slaying of the horses recalls the initial butchering of the foxes. In effect, both horses and foxes are part of the chain of production, with the horses' bodies filling a crucial gap in the system. To ensure the continuation of the process, the foxes must be fed, and they are fattened on the bodies of the horses.

As I have suggested above, drawing attention to the use of such words as "raised," to the father's role as the warden of the foxes, and to the placement of the calendars on both sides of the kitchen door, the cycle of production on the farm parallels the production of gendered subjects within the family. The familial discourse—a discourse which is "absolutely central to the perpetuation of the present, phallocentric order"—must also be fed; it too requires bodies.

Understandably, the narrator neglects to mention the butchering of the horses. She represses the information until the end of the story, claiming that she merely "forgot to say what the foxes were fed." More likely, her desire to omit the information is connected to her wish to leave the image of her father untarnished. She has a vested interest in preserving the white-wash that protects the powerful figure to whom she is allied. Perhaps she believed that a denial of the operation would ensure her protection. With the butchering of the horses, Henry Bailey reappears, as does the initial menace inherent in Bailey's "joke," swiping at the protagonist with the sack of dead foxes.

When they learn that the butchering will take place, the narrator and her brother make their way to the stable, where they find Bailey "looking at his collection of calendars." The reappearance of the calendars recalls the initial discussion concerning the placement of the calendars on the kitchen door and the significance of their portrayal of the colonization of the wilderness.

Unlike the calendars in the family kitchen, however, Bailey's calendars are "tacked up behind the stalls" in a part of the stable the mother "had probably never seen." Bailey's calendars are hidden from the mother for good reason: they are almost certainly pornographic. At this point the link between the calendar and the colonization of female

bodies becomes explicit: the father's "stable"—a pen for livestock—becomes a pen for Bailey's pin-up girls, women who have received a specific projection of male desire.

In keeping with this brutal character, Bailey treats the butchering of the first horse, Mack, as a bit of fun. When the narrator asks if he is going to shoot the horse, Bailey breaks into a song about "darkies": "Oh there's no more work, for poor uncle Ned, he's gone where the good darkies go." In effect, foxes, savages, horses, and now "darkies" fall under the category of those bodies supposedly aligned with nature. When there is no more work for a fox, a horse, or a Black, in the terms outlined by the discourse of production, they are condemned to death. The "pen" of the patriarchal, capitalist institution has the power to inscribe and erase each and every one of them.

Despite Bailey's enjoyment of power, it is the father who ultimately shoots the horse. Bailey laughs as the horse kicks its legs in the air "as if Mack had done a trick for him." The image of the horse's death has tremendous impact upon the narrator. In the midst of other thoughts, the memory intrudes upon her consciousness; she sees "the easily practiced way her father raised gun, and hears Henry laughing when Mack kicked his legs in the air." Bailey's laughter is particularly unnerving because it fully exposes his delight in power based on sheer inequality.

The narrator recognizes this as an abuse of power, not due to any innate feminine instincts, but as a result of her own experience. She, too, lorded power over an innocent victim; when Laird was younger, she told him to climb to the top beam in the barn. "Young and obedient," as trusting as the horse led to slaughter, Laird did as he was told. When her parents rushed to the scene, her mother wept, asking her why she had not watched him. Perhaps as a result of her mother's distress, the narrator's behaviour later fills her with regret. She felt a weight in her stomach, the "sadness of unexorcised guilt."

In addition to finding the display of power distasteful, after the shooting the narrator can no longer continue to separate her father from his hired man. After the shooting, her father's "easy" practiced movements and the hired man's laughter coalesce. The white-wash dissolves. The father loses his innocence. On some level, the narrator realizes that it was never her mother who would "act out of perversity . . . to try her power" but her father, the person she had trusted all along. However, it is only when the men try to shoot the second horse, Flora, that she radically breaks from her male-identified position.

In many respects, Flora resembles the spirited horse of the narrator's nocturnal fantasies. When the men try to pen her in, to use her for their own, limited ends, the mare makes a run between Bailey and the father. For the first time, an inmate dares attempt to escape. Immediately the father calls to his daughter, telling her to shut the gate and lock the horse in. Yet, instead of carrying out his instructions, she opens the gate "as wide as she could." Without deliberating, she frustrates her father's project of separating inside from outside and she challenges his unquestioned right to legislate who moves across these borders.

Laird, watching his sister's scandalous behaviour, cannot comprehend why she disobeys her father. When the men swing by in their truck, he begs them to take him along. As they lift him into the truck, the little boy becomes a man: he joins the hunting party. Upon his return, he brandishes the streak of blood on his arm, behaving as if he just beheaded a lion instead of shooting a geriatric horse. No matter, the mark of blood and the domination of the Other continues to function as a crucial element in the rites of manhood. The boy cements his alliance with the father on the basis of their mutual triumph over nature.

The narrator, however, distanced from the father's activities, looks upon the spectacle and sees it for the sad charade it is. She knows that there is no longer any viable distinction to be made between nature and culture—in this case, wilderness and civilization—and that, when these distinctions are made, they are imposed by more powerful forces upon the weaker. After helping the mare to escape, she sums up the hopelessness of the situation: Flora would not really get away. They would catch up with her in the truck. Or if they did not catch her this morning somebody would see her and telephone us this afternoon or tomorrow. *There was no wild country here for her to run to, only farms* [emphasis mine].

At night, the heroes return to assemble around the table. Laird denounces his sister, telling everyone that she let the horse escape. Rather than deny the accusation, the narrator bursts into tears and fully expects to be sent from the table for her unseemly, "feminine" behaviour. But her behaviour is taken for granted. Yet why should she be asked to leave the room? The kitchen is to be domain, after all.

Relishing his newly acquired power, Laird points out that she is crying, but the father tells him "never mind." For the first time, the family treats her as a female. Her father shows her the same kind of consideration he showed her mother the night the latter confronted him at the barn. He listened to the mother's complaints, "politely as he would to a salesman or a stranger, but with an air of waiting to get on with his *real* work" (emphasis mine).

As the narrator herself predicts, her refusal to participate in the father's project of spatial control ultimately severs her connection to him. After she defies him she realizes "he was not going to trust me anymore, he would know that I was not entirely on his side." The use of the word "side" further emphasizes the spatial transformation whereby the narrator permanently aligns herself with Flora. (The horse is aptly named, suggesting a relationship to nature and, by extension, the female.) Like her mother and the other natural bodies (foxes, savages, horses, and darkies), she becomes "unreal." The father has only to seal her fate by naming her and he does so "with resignation and even good humor."

Assuming his right as the giver of names, a male privilege which extends as far back as the first male—Adam—the father pronounces the words which "absolved and dismissed" the protagonist for good: "she's only a girl." The act of naming constitutes yet another form of enclosing. However, in order for these words to have any power over her, she must accept the name—which she does, saying, "I didn't protest that, even in

my heart. Maybe it was true." If being a girl means refusing to sanction violence and the abuse of power, then she must indeed be a girl. In the end, brother and sister take up their "rightful" positions, acquiescing to the pressures which divide them physically and psychically. The cultural discourse has been inculcated. A revolution in the cycle of production is complete.

One final note. Although this is the ostensible conclusion, the read must keep in mind that the story is not told by the child. The mature narrator speaks from the margins (space that is not rigidly monitored), the only position where the cultural project of production remains scrutable. Thus, like the hostile foxes, who even after death continue to exude a strong primitive odour "of fox itself," the narrator's identity has not been completely fixed by an ideology which accords her a role and set of behaviour on the basis of her sex. The consistent tension between the bitter, mournful adult voice and the child's idealistic perception suggests that she continues to resist and criticize the patriarchal system which names her.

Source: Marlene Goldman, "Penning in the Bodies: The Construction of Gendered Subjects in Alice Munro's 'Boys and Girls'," in *Studies in Canadian Literature,* Vol. 15, No. 1,1990, pp. 62-75.

Topics for Further Study

The narrator's father is in the fur trade in this story, as were many Canadians. Research the history of the Canadian fur trade. Which "peltries" (pelts/furs) were its primary exports? Does Canada still specialize in fur? Where are the markets for these goods?

Then Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau and his wife were international figures during the 1970s. What made this couple such interesting and vital figures?

"Boys and Girls" uses an old popular saying, "only a girl," to neat effect. Currently, popular culture is evincing a plethora of "girl" associations or buzzwords: Girl Power, "bad grrrls or riot grrrls," and so on. This activity is interesting in light of earlier feminist efforts to isolate the word "girl" and indicate that it was commonly

used to refer to adult females, and not just (female) children or teenagers. The push to insist on the use of the word "woman" for an adult female seems to have been largely successful. Do these "girl" movements represent something of a retreat even if they are largely in reference to teenaged girls or younger women? Or do they represent something different and new? Discuss.

Gloria Steinem was a major United States feminist activist around the time Munro wrote "Boys and Girls." Research Canadian feminist history and find out who the major feminists in Canada at this time were.

Which Native American tribes are indigenous to Canada? What is the history of their reservation or land rights activism in the last twenty years?

Compare and Contrast

1960s and 1970s: In Canada (as in the United States and other locales), the Women's Movement flourishes and establishes itself. Along with other groups of people demanding equal rights, women activists gain significant social advances.

1990s: In the United States, the Men's Movement, including organizations like the Promise-keepers, begins. Organized by a few charismatic leaders, men begin to get together to renew a sense of their masculinity, or, in the case of one movement, to push for a return to societal arrangements before feminism.

1960s: Native Americans (whether hailing from Canada or the United States), begin to contest

their status within these countries. The Canadians, whose French-English colonial history had long given them a sense of the "multicultural," begin to expand this sense of diversity to accommodate recognition of the persons who were native to that geographical locale. The United States enacts Civil Rights legislation to guarantee equal treatment of racial minorities.

1990s: The terms "melting pot" and "multicultural" now vie with terms like "diversity," "difference," and "hybridization." All these words attempt to describe the ethnic and cultural scene in highly diverse nations, or, more recently, these notions are being used to refer to the new global space of meeting cultures and groups.

What Do I Read Next?

Lives of Girls and Women (1971), Alice Munro's second published book is, like "Boys and Girls," a female coming of age tale. It is also the story of its protagonist's development as a writer.

Twentieth-century writers interested in writing a book about artistic calling will find that James Joyce's brilliant *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1914) is worthwhile reading. This book, like Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women*, is part of a sub-category in fiction in which writers fictionalize their own artistic apprenticeships.

One Canadian critic has written an essay which specifically addresses Canadian coming of age stories. This critic compares Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women* to other Canadian books concerned with the theme of adolescence and growing up: Anthony B. Dawson, "Coming of Age in Canada," *Mosaic* 11, No. 3, Spring, 1978, pp. 47-62.

The novel *Housekeeping* (1970), by Marilynne Robinson, is an extraordinary and beautifully written novel about a family of four women who, like Munro's characters, live a rural life.

Further Study

Morton, Desmond. *A Short History of Canada,* Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Inc., 1994.

A history of the Canadian nation first published in 1983, and revised in 1987 and 1994.

Muir, Alexander. *From Aberdeen to Ottawa in 1845: The Diary of Alexander Muir,* Aberdeen: Aberdeen UP, 1990.

George A. McKenzie is the editor of this selection of diary entries written by a nineteenth-century Scotsman who traveled through the Canadian region before it became the nation it is today.

Munro, Alice. "Working for a Living," in *Grand Street,* Vol. 1, No. 1, Autumn, 1981, pp. 9-37.

An autobiographical essay.

Struthers, J. R. (Tim). "Alice Munro and the American South," in *Here and Now: A Critical Anthology,* Vol. 1 of

The Canadian Novel, edited by John Moss, Toronto: NC Press, 1978.

Struthers compares Munro's southern and rural Canadian fiction to the fiction written by Southern United States writers. He develops a correspondence between the two literatures based, in part, on their common status as regions which have hosted large Scots-Irish communities in the Americas.

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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

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