Bright and Morning Star Study Guide

Bright and Morning Star by Richard Wright

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Introduction

When Richard Wright wrote "Bright and Morning Star," he was involved with the Communist Party. His first published stories (a category to which "Bright and Morning Star" belongs) centered on communist themes, such as organizing the working force and fighting for the rights of oppressed people. These first stories most often appeared in leftist periodicals.

At the time of publication of "Bright and Morning Star," Wright was living in New York and was working as the Harlem editor for the communist newspaper the *Daily Worker.* "Bright and Morning Star" was first published in 1938 in *The Masses,* a radical, socialist monthly journal, and was not collected in the original publication of *Uncle Tom's Children.* Rather, it was in 1940, when *Uncle Tom's Children* was reprinted and expanded, that "Bright and Morning Star" was included in this collection.

Besides being influenced by the philosophy of the Community Party, Wright often made mention, especially during the beginning of his writing career, of Theodore Dreiser and Sinclair Lewis, writers who discussed topics such as the debilitating effects of the American class system and the struggles of working-class people, and whose writing styles impressed Wright. Wright admired their straightforward language and their goal to reproduce in their stories a reality that was as close to truth as possible, and he adopted the style to reflect on the absurdities of the oppression of black people.

However, it was not Wright's writing style that attracted his eventual wide readership. It was his subject matter, which he presented in shocking and realistic detail. When "Bright and Morning Star" was published in the revised edition of *Uncle Tom's Children,* Wright was well known because of the commercial success of his novel *Native Son.* He gained this fame just as the Harlem Renaissance (a name given to an era, vaguely assigned as the 1920s, of a flourishing of African-American arts) was fading. Wright's work, with its more realistic and angrier tone, is said to have signaled a new period in African-American literature. The new writing was more political than the body of works that had been produced during the Harlem Renaissance. Wright's books prefigured the beginning of the Black Arts Movement (1950s to 1970s), whose authors included Ralph Ellison *(The Invisible Man,* 1952) and James Baldwin *(Go Tell It on the Mountain,* 1953). The overall aim of this group's literature was to end racism, and the movement has been hailed as one of the more important forces behind the eventual Civil Rights movement. Many authors in this movement were said to have been greatly influenced by Wright's work.

Author Biography

Richard Nathaniel Wright was born on Rucker's Plantation on September 4, 1908, in Roxie, Mississippi. This was, writes Alfred Kazin in his article "Too Honest for His Own Time," "a terrible place for a poor black to be born." Wright's father, Nathan, an illiterate sharecropper, deserted his family when Wright was five years old. Ella (Wilson), Wright's mother, was a schoolteacher, but after her husband left, she had to take on jobs as a maid or cook. Wright was forced to move from state to state, as his mother pursued jobs and looked for financial support from other family members.

Because of his mother's disintegrating health, Wright spent the latter part of his youth under the supervision of his maternal grandmother, Margaret Bolden Wilson, a strict Seventh Day Adventist who believed that all nonreligious books were works of the devil. Wright, gifted with unusual intelligence, never understood why his mother and grandmother, as well as most of the black southern population around him, acted so subservient to white people, and he developed a rebellious attitude that included a love of learning about life outside of his daily parameters—specifically, life experiences referred to in nonreligious books. He became a voracious reader, with H. L. Mencken, Theodore Dreiser, and Sinclair Lewis being among his first favorites.

Wright attended several different schools, but the last of his formal education ended with his graduation from the ninth grade, for which he was class valedictorian. One year prior to this graduation, the *Southern Register,* a local newspaper, published Wright's first work, an adventure story titled "The Voodoo of Hell's Half-Acre." Whether it was this publication of his work or his rebellious nature that inspired him, Wright came to the conclusion that public education was not teaching him enough, and shortly after dropping out of school, he began a journey that would lead him to Chicago, where he would join the Federal Negro Theatre, the Illinois Writers' Project, and, eventually, the American Communist Party.

Most of Wright's early works were heavily influenced by the leftist politics of the Communist Party, and in 1937 he moved to New York to become the editor of the party's paper, the *Daily Worker.* One year later, a collection of Wright's short stories was published with the title *Uncle Tom's Children.* "Bright and Morning Star" (first published in *The Masses,* a monthly socialist journal of arts and politics) was not included in this collection until after Wright enjoyed a triumphal reception of his first published novel, *Native Son* (1940), and *Uncle Tom's Children* was reissued as an expanded edition.

Black Boy (1945), Wright's autobiographical story about his childhood, would mark the end of his most popular publications. He would continue publishing but not to the same wide publicity and sales that he had enjoyed earlier. He was, however, not idle during this time. Besides his continued writing projects, he was involved in the production of the film of *Native Son,* lectured in major European capitals, and made several guest appearances on radio and television. During the decade after World War II, when the foundations of European colonialism were in decline, Wright traveled to African and Asian countries, "fascinated," as Robert Bone writes in his book *Richard Wright,* "by this

confrontation of a civilization and its former subject peoples." From these travels came Wright's summary of the colonial revolution in his book *White Man, Listen!* (1957).

Wright was married twice: first, in 1939, to Rose Dhima Meadman, a classical dancer; and second, in 1941, to Ellen Poplar, a Communist Party organizer. He had two daughters with Ellen: Julia (born in 1942) and Rachel (born in 1949). In 1947, Wright moved to Paris, France, where he remained until his death on November 28, 1960. Officially, Wright died of a heart attack; however, some people, including his daughter Julia, have contended that Wright was murdered. During the last year of his life, Wright suffered from amoebic dysentery, an ailment that he apparently acquired during his travels. While his wife and daughters visited London (a visit that Wright was denied by British government officials), he entered a medical clinic in Paris to recuperate. It was here that Wright was proclaimed dead. He was fifty-two years old. On the third of December, Wright's body was cremated, along with a copy of his *Black Boy.* His ashes remain at the Pere Lachaise Cemetery in Paris.

Plot Summary

Part I

The first part of "Bright and Morning Star" begins with the protagonist, Sue, standing at the window, looking into the rain, wondering when her son Johnny-Boy will come home. He is late, and Sue is worried. She fears for her son because he is involved in organizing his community in order to gain power through the Communist Party. Her son Sug is already in jail for the same practices.

Sue is proud of her sons because they are strong enough to withhold secret information about the members of the Communist Party, even when pain is inflicted upon them by the sheriff and his men. Sue is a descendant of slaves, living in the South where Jim Crow laws prevail, under which blacks are systematically denied civil and political rights and their labor is exploited. Sue lives in poverty and stress. She is fearful of white people because of her own lack of power. Early in her life, Sue turned to Christianity to help ease the horrendous conditions under which she lived. She sought solace in religion, which promised her everlasting reward upon her death. All Sue had to do was make it through this life, avoiding all contamination from sin, and she would go to heaven. This meant that she had to be kind to her aggressors, submissive to their threats and abuses, and humble in her requests.

Sue's sons, on the other hand, take a different turn in their lives. They discover socialism as defined by the Community Party. They believe that they must take their lives into their own hands and fight for what is rightfully theirs. Slowly, Sue has come to understand her sons' philosophy, although she still holds on to some of her religious beliefs. She also holds onto her fear and mistrust of white people, something that her sons attempt to resolve, because they believe that they need sympathetic white people to help them gain power.

While Sue is jointly involved in reminiscing and worrying about the late arrival of her son Johnny-Boy, she hears footsteps on her front porch. It is the young white girl Reva, who has a crush on Johnny-Boy and who also helps him in his attempts to organize the community. Sue and Reva have a brief conversation in which Reva tells Sue that one of the members of the secret group has told the sheriff about an upcoming meeting. Although Sue is troubled about Johnny-Boy, she does not tell Reva about her concern. She does not want Reva to worry. Sue only tells her that Johnny-Boy is a little late coming home and that maybe Reva should tell her father to get the word out on his own. Reva then leaves, and Sue ponders about the girl, wondering why she is so naive about becoming involved with her son. Interracial marriages or even physical contact between the sexes was not only illegal or forbidden in the South, it could be deadly.

Part II

As the second part opens, Sue hears footsteps in the mud outside her house. She recognizes them as the sounds of her son Johnny-Boy. He enters the house in silence, and Sue, as is her custom, doesn't look his way. The narrator explains that Sue and Johnny-Boy have a way of communicating in silence. Instead, Sue thinks about her husband and wonders how he might have affected the lives of her sons. She also thinks about Reva and Johnny-Boy, knowing that Reva loves him, but Sue is still worried about the dismal future of that relationship.

Johnny-Boy and Sue then engage in a brief conversation. Sue feeds him and dries his clothes before she tells him the news about the sheriff having found out about the secret meeting. She gives Johnny-Boy time to relax. When Sue does tell him, she begins a familiar argument with him, telling him that he shouldn't trust white people so much. Sue suspects that it is one of the white people in the group who has snitched to the sheriff. Johnny-Boy chastises her, telling her that white people and black people have to work together if black people are ever to succeed.

Before he leaves, Johnny-Boy hands his mother a wad of paper money that he has taken out of his pocket. He tells her to keep it should something happen to him. It is money that belongs to the Communist Party, and Johnny-Boy wants to make sure that it goes toward the party's success. Sue insists that Johnny-Boy keep the money. She tells him that she has been saving money to get her son Sug out of jail. She can use that money instead. When Johnny-Boy finally leaves, Sue senses that he will never return.

Part III

As Sue sleeps, a group of white men enter her home. She awakens to their voices. The men are rude and overtly racist. They make statements like, "Gee, this place smells like niggers!" and "Niggers make good jam!" They proceed to examine all the food Sue has in the kitchen, and when they are about to start eating it, the sheriff reminds them that they did not come there to eat the food, that they are looking for Johnny-Boy.

Sue rises from bed and approaches them, telling them to get out of her house. One of the men throws cooked greens into her face and asks, "How they taste, ol [b-]?" Caught up in the spirit of rebellion, Sue talks back to the men, trying to demonstrate that she is not afraid of them. They ask her to tell them where her son is, but she refuses. She responds, "Don yuh wished yuh knowed?" This irritates the sheriff, and he slaps her. She continues to be non-compliant, and the sheriff slaps her again.

The narrator states that Sue was "consumed with a bitter pride" at this point. She did not care what they did to her; she would never tell them anything. The sheriff is eventually convinced that this woman will not reveal the whereabouts of her son or of the meeting, so he begins to leave. However, Sue, somewhat pumped up with that bitter pride, taunts the sheriff one more time. The sheriff has had enough. He walks back up the steps of her porch and beats Sue until she is unconscious.

Part IV

The fourth part opens with Sue by herself, lying in a dark hallway. She is just rousing herself back to consciousness. As she tries to gain some clarity of thought, she notices that something is standing before her. This something makes her nervous, but she does not know why. A few minutes later, she realizes that it is Booker, a white man who has recently joined the Communist Party. She is suspicious of him, but he eases his way into her thoughts, telling her that someone needs to warn the members that the sheriff is onto them. Booker, having just recently joined, does not know the names of the other members. As he helps her up and cleans her wounds, she slowly gives into his pleas and reveals the names of the members. When Booker leaves and Sue's thoughts become clearer, she fears that she might have made a horrible mistake.

Part V

As Sue sits in her house contemplating this awful thing she might have done, Reva comes back. She also nurses Sue's wounds and announces that her father has told her that Booker is the one who leaked the information about the meeting to the sheriff. Sue is terrified by this news. It confirms her worst suspicions. However, she does not want to tell Reva what she has done. Instead, she convinces Reva to go to bed. Once Reva is asleep, Sue pulls out an old gun, wraps it in a sheet, and goes looking for Booker, determined to kill him before he can tell the sheriff the names of all the members.

Part VI

The sheriff had warned Sue earlier that it did not matter if she did not tell them where Johnny-Boy was, that he would find him anyway. When he did find him, if Johnny-Boy did not talk, Sue should plan to come to the sheriff with a sheet so she could wrap Johnny-Boy's body in it, for he would be dead. So when Sue shows up and faces the sheriff and his men with a sheet wrapped around her arms, they assume that she has come for her son's body. The men, however, tell her that Johnny-Boy is not yet dead. He is tied up and lying in the mud when she finds him. When the sheriff sees Sue, he comments that he must have slapped some sense into her after all, since she has come with the sheet as he told her to do.

In her presence, the group of men continue to ask Johnny-Boy to tell them the names of the people involved in the Communist Party and where they will be holding their next meeting. Johnny-Boy is silent. The men beat him, and at one point they place his legs over a log and break them with a crowbar. Then the sheriff pops Johnny-Boy's eardrums.

Sue watches all of this, waiting for Booker to appear. She hopes that she has time, after killing Booker, to put her son out of his misery. When Booker finally shows, Sue shoots him, but she then enters into a mental state that she refers to as having given up "her

life before they took it from her." The sheriff's men then shoot both Sue and Johnny-Boy. Sue's last words are: "Yuh didnt git whut you wanted!"

Part 1

Part 1 Summary

It is raining and has been for quite some time. As Sue looks out her window into the dark, miserable night, her thoughts turn to Johnny-Boy, who has been out in this weather all day. She briefly wonders why he didn't send someone else out in the rain, before reminding herself that he doesn't trust very many people.

Sue then turns her attention to the pile of clothing in the zinc washtub that needs to be ironed. She irons in silence for quite some time, but when a gust of wind causes the rain to pelt her window, she again wishes for Johnny-Boy to come home. The cold and rain also make her long for her other son, Sug and she imagines how wonderful it would be if the three of them could once again spend an evening together; however, since Sug is in jail, this is not possible.

Sue acknowledges that she is overly anxious and has been ever since she learned that another Communist party meeting was being planned. She knows that Johnny-Boy is out notifying his comrades about this meeting and now that he is over an hour late in arriving home, she becomes fearful that something has happened to him. She tries to ignore the nagging feeling she has by consuming herself in her work. However, she cannot stop worrying about her son, particularly since it was just a year ago that Sug was out notifying fellow Communists about a meeting when he was arrested, beaten and thrown into jail because he would not identify his comrades.

Sue recalls the day she learned of Sug's arrest. She earned her living by washing and ironing other people's laundry and was returning home with a bundle of clothes when Bob, Johnny-Boy's friend, called her from across the field to tell her that Sug had been taken away by the sheriff. From that point on, it seemed as though everything in her life was more difficult; the bundles of laundry were harder to lift, as were the tubs of water in which the clothes were washed and the iron that was used to press them. In an effort to help ease her fear, Sue begins to softly sing a song she learned from her mother. Like Sue, her mother spent long hours doing hard labor for only a few cents' wages. And her mother instilled in her a strong faith in Jesus. As Sue grew into adulthood and had to learn to live in a world where white people and their laws took precedence over her life, she found her faith continually tested. The death of her mother, her difficult marriage to a man who died young and left her with two boys and her boys growing up and joining the Communist Party, were all events that Sue handled with grace and strength. Over time, as she began to learn about Communism from her sons, she started to believe that the party's beginnings were quite similar to Jesus' Resurrection. Before long, she became so strong in her convictions that she began to harbor hatred for those who sought to destroy the party. Even so, she often finds comfort in the spiritual songs of her youth.

Sue's thoughts are interrupted by a knock at the door. It is Reva, a white girl who is in love with Johnny-Boy. As she enters the house, Reva asks if Johnny-Boy has arrived home yet. Sue says that he hasn't and tells her to take off her wet shoes. As Reva gets out of her wet clothes, Sue wonders to herself if Reva's father has any idea of her feelings for Johnny-Boy. When Reva has finished removing her shoes, she tells Sue that the sheriff had been at her home earlier that evening to see her father. Apparently, the sheriff had somehow gotten word of the planned party meeting, but Reva assures Sue that Johnny-Boy's name was not mentioned. Even so, she thinks it would be best that the meeting be cancelled.

As Sue listens to Reva, she is overcome with a feeling that something terrible has already happened to Johnny-Boy. She implores Reva to tell her the truth, but Reva insists that, to her knowledge, he is fine. The two women wonder aloud who it was who alerted the sheriff to the meeting and both agree that it was probably one of the party's newest members.

As she ponders all that Reva has told her, Sue realizes that her feelings are mixed. While she loves her son deeply, she also recognizes that he is happiest when he is doing the work of the party. As a result, she realizes that he has to continue this work, even if it means that he will eventually meet the same fate as Sug. Before Reva leaves to return home, she reminds Sue to tell Johnny-Boy to tell his comrades to stay away from her house. Sue assures her that she will and then stands in the doorway to watch Reva disappear into the dark, rainy night.

Part 1 Analysis

"Bright & Morning Star" is a short story that explores the complex themes of racism and the wide reaches of a mother's love for her children. While the story is told in the third person, the author chose to use the dialect commonly spoken in the South in the dialogue between the characters. While this does make portions of the story a little more difficult to read and understand, it is nonetheless effective because it gives the story a more realistic tone and it provides the reader with a better sense of the extent to which tensions between white people and Negroes existed during this period.

As the story begins, we meet the principal character, a black woman named Sue. We learn within the first few pages that she has had a difficult life, characterized by hard work and deep emotional loss. Yet, like many black women of this time, Sue is physically and emotionally strong. She is also fiercely devoted to her sons. So strong is this devotion that she tries to forsake her Christian upbringing to support her sons' growing interest in the Communist party.

As the story unfolds, we see that Sue cannot totally abandon her beliefs, particularly when she is troubled, for it is during these times that the Negro spiritual hymns of her childhood spring to her mind and lips. There are several examples of this; the first is during the early portion of the story when she is waiting for Johnny-Boy to come home. Recall Sue's own reaction to her singing: "Guiltily, she stopped and smiled. Looks like

Ah ju cant seem t fergit them ol songs no mattah how hard Ah tries..." Later, as she contemplates whether or not to try to beat Booker to Foley's Woods and a hymn again comes to mind, she acknowledges that although she thought that her sons were successful in getting her to forget about Jesus, she realizes this is not the case.

The other character we meet in this section is a young woman named Reva. We don't learn very much about her here or in the rest of the story, only that she is white and in love with Johnny-Boy. It is obvious that Sue likes and trusts Reva, which is interesting because she seems to have a deep distrust for white people. The author provides a hint as to why this is toward the end of the first section when he writes that Reva's trust and acceptance of Sue has, for the first time in her life, kindled a sense of humanity within her.

The fact that the story takes place on a cold, rainy night is significant in that it represents the despair that Sue has endured thus far in her life. It also serves to create an ominous feeling that almost instantly gives the reader a sense that the story is not going to have a good outcome.

Part 2

Part 2 Summary

Not long after Sue returns to her ironing, she finally hears Johnny-Boy's footsteps outside. Instead of feeling relieved, she senses that she will soon be saying good-bye to her son. She doesn't look up from her ironing as he enters the house, but hears him take off his shoes and then light his pipe. As he dozes off, his pipe drops to the floor. Sue brings her son a pillow and as he rests, she decides that even though it is nearly eleven o'clock at night, she will wait until he has had something to eat before telling him that he needs to tell his comrades that the meeting is off.

Sue moves away from ironing and goes to the stove to fix Johnny-Boy's dinner. When he finishes eating, she decides to let him rest for awhile before telling him about the meeting. After putting away her ironing, she pours herself a cup of coffee and sits down at the table with her son. She tells him about Reva's visit earlier in the evening and that the sheriff knows about the meeting. As Johnny-Boy absorbs this, she tells him that she thinks that he has let far too many white people into the party too quickly and that it is likely that one of them is responsible for the information leak. Johnny-Boy defends his actions and tells his mother that it was necessary to take in members quickly so that the party could grow and become stronger. When Sue reiterates her thought, Johnny-Boy becomes impatient and tells his mother that he doesn't see people in terms of being black and white; rather, he sees them as being either rich or poor.

As Sue does the dinner dishes, she hears Johnny-Boy putting his shoes back on. Her throat tightens as she realizes that in a few moments he will leave and may never come back. Before he leaves, Johnny-Boy tries to give his mother the money he has been holding for the party, but she insists that he keep it in case he needs to leave town and start over somewhere else. Sue then walks her son to the door and watches as he disappears into the cold, wet night. When she can no longer hear his footsteps, she closes the door and goes to her bedroom.

Part 2 Analysis

In this part of the story, we come to understand that, despite her outward strength, Sue is deeply afraid of losing her son. Her life thus far has been punctuated by untimely losses; the tragic death of her mother, the untimely death of her husband and Sug's recent incarceration have all combined to essentially strip away everyone that is important to her, except Johnny-Boy. And now, facing the prospect of losing her only remaining son, Sue manages to remain stoic. Interestingly, during the course of this story they spend only a brief time together; the hour or so that elapses during this part of the story and the few moments at the story's end. It is clear, though, that they have a deep unspoken love for each other. Indeed, when Sue senses that this will be the last opportunity she will have to spend time with her son, she says "to see him now was to

say good-bye. But it was a good-bye she knew she could never say; they were not that way toward each other." From this, we can surmise that, while Sue may not outwardly demonstrate her love for her son, it nonetheless exists. This also provides a glimpse of what is to come; that is, when Johnny-Boy leaves the house, it will be for the last time. What is unclear at this point is whether he will be forced to live in exile, jailed like his brother, or killed.

We also see that, despite her son's beliefs, Sue still feels a great deal of hate and distrust with respect to white people. She is sure that it was one of the new white comrades - and not one of "our" (i.e. Negro) people - that leaked the news about the meeting. And, even though Johnny-Boy tries to convince her otherwise, she does not change her opinion.

In this section, we also see Sue handle the first of many decisions she will need to make during this story. Recall how, when deciding to tell Johnny-Boy about the potential for trouble, Sue decides to first wait until he has had his dinner and then delays even further by waiting until he has had a chance to rest. While this may initially be seen as a sign of uncertainty, Sue's reluctance is actually borne of her knowing that once she does share this news with Johnny-Boy, things will never again be the same.

Part 3

Part 3 Summary

Sue is in a deep sleep when she becomes aware that someone is in her house. She realizes at once that whoever is there is looking for Johnny-Boy. She walks slowly to the kitchen where several white men are gathered. As she reaches the room, she tells them to leave. Startled, the men fall silent. Sue becomes aware of a sudden movement by one of the men and in an instant she feels something in her face. Reaching up, she finds that one of the men has thrown a handful of greens, remains in the pot from the night before, at her. She repeats her order for them to leave.

The sheriff approaches and tells Sue that he is there to help her. When Sue expresses doubt about his sincerity, another man speaks up and tells her to remember that she is talking to white men. Sue seems to ignore this and repeats her request for them to leave. Rather than answer, the sheriff asks Sue where Johnny-Boy is. When she doesn't respond, he asks again. When his second request is met with continued silence, he slaps her so hard across her face that she falls to the ground. As Sue rises to her feet, the sheriff slaps her again. As she rises for the second time, the sheriff once again asks where Johnny-Boy is. Sue responds that they will need to find him. The sheriff responds by telling her that if they need to look for her son, they will kill him when they eventually do find him.

The sheriff then asks Sue where the meeting is supposed to be held. Sue refuses to tell them and so the sheriff once again threatens to kill Johnny-Boy. Despite the fact that she knows her son will almost certainly die, Sue is proud of her defiance, pride and strength. And so, as the sheriff and the rest of the men leave her house, Sue cannot help but shout to them that they did not get what they came for. This angers the sheriff, who immediately turns around and hits her with a crushing blow. While she is still lying on the ground, he kicks her in the head and stomach before leaving to join the other men.

Part 3 Analysis

This section provides an uncomfortably clear illustration of the extent to which racism existed during the period in which the story takes place. The blatant disrespect that the sheriff and his deputies have for Sue and her home is immediately evident. Yet, despite their hostile and violent behavior, Sue remains strong. Indeed, it is her pride that allows her to endure the sheriff's violent blows. As Wright writes, "She was consumed with a bitter pride." This tells us that, despite the years of injustices and mistreatment, she has managed to hold on to her own values, which include protecting her son as best she could. While she knows that she cannot protect him completely, that is, she realizes that eventually he will be caught and in all likelihood killed, she has, to this point, been able to keep from providing the information that will lead to his demise. Her decision to

conceal this information is not made to purposely keep the names of the comrades from the sheriff, but rather to protect the dignity of both of her sons. While Sue realizes that she does not fully subscribe to her sons' Communist beliefs, she knows that the Party is extremely important to them. By refusing to cooperate with the sheriff, Sue is supporting her sons' beliefs and, in the process, providing another example of the depth of her love for them.

Part 4

Part 4 Summary

Sue eventually regains consciousness. As she struggles to regain her senses, she is faintly aware of her name being called. It takes some time for her to recognize the white face staring at her as Booker, one of the party's newest members. As Sue tries to rise to her feet, Booker asks her where she was hit. Amid her protests, Booker carries her into the kitchen and then gets a wet cloth to put on her injured head. Sue is reluctant to accept Booker's help, but eventually she takes the washcloth from him.

After a few moments, Booker tells Sue that the sheriff and the other men have found Johnny-Boy and that they have him in the woods trying to make him talk about the meeting. Sue knows at once that she needs to inform the other comrades to not go to the meeting scheduled for the morning, for to do so would mean certain death for them. As she struggles to rise to her feet, Booker stops her, telling her that she is far too weak to go out. He asks her to tell him who needs to be informed and says he will take care of it for her.

Sue is conflicted; she knows that she cannot possibly go out and inform the comrades, but she isn't so sure that she should trust Booker. When Booker again asks her for the names, she tells him she doesn't know who they are. Booker continues to press her for the names and, eventually, Sue gives up. Then, as Booker recites the names of people he suspects are also in the party, she tells him whether or not they are actually members. When they are finished, Sue is overcome with a sense that she has been tricked by Booker.

Part 4 Analysis

As we read this section, we come to realize that Sue's instincts about white people are correct. Booker's visit to her home, while seemingly made as a gesture of good will, turns out to be a calculated move contrived to entice her to supply the names of Johnny-Boy's comrades. And, in the only moment of weakness displayed by Sue throughout this entire story, she takes his bait and supplies the names. While this seems to be a fatal mistake on her part, in the end, it likely wouldn't have changed the outcome for, by this time, Johnny-Boy is already in custody.

When Booker leaves, Sue realizes that she is no longer afraid. What isn't written, but can be implied from this is that Sue now knows that her son will most definitely die. Freed from the uncertainty about this, she becomes even stronger and she sets out to ensure that the names of the comrades are not given to the sheriff.

Part 5

Part 5 Summary

Sue spends the next several hours huddled over her stove contemplating all that has happened. She knows that she will likely never see either of her sons again. Her thoughts are interrupted by Reva's entrance into the kitchen. She gets up and hugs the girl who, noticing the wounds on her head, asks what happened. Sue decides not to tell her for the time being and instead, the two women go into the kitchen so that Reva can clean her wounds.

As Reva cleans and dresses the wounds on Sue's head, she asks if Johnny-Boy had come home. When Sue says that he had, Reva asks if she told him about what she had heard. When Sue says that she did, Reva seems pleased and tells Sue that she knew everything would turn out fine. Hearing Reva's exuberance proves to be too much for Sue and she finds herself near tears. However, she also knows that she must remain strong for the young woman's sake and so she remains stoic.

Suddenly feeling the need to be alone, Sue suggests to Reva that she should go to bed. Reva resists, but eventually, Sue is able to convince her that she will be fine by herself. As she sits alone in her kitchen, Sue wonders what she should do. She contemplates trying to reach the woods where Johnny-Boy is said to be before Booker can get there, but she isn't sure what she would do once she got there. She finally decides to go to the woods with a white sheet to retrieve her son's body. Before she leaves, however, she goes into Johnny-Boy's bedroom to get the gun that he keeps in his dresser drawer.

Part 5 Analysis

Here we are given the opportunity to see a little more of Sue's compassionate side. Given all that has happened to her - the beatings by the sheriff and her subsequent moment of weakness with Booker - it would be understandable if she broke down and told Reva about everything that has transpired that evening. Instead, however, Sue decides to remain stoic and, in the process, succeeds in reassuring Reva that Johnny-Boy will be fine, even after Reva confirms her suspicion that Booker was indeed sent to her by the sheriff. While Sue's motives for doing this are not specifically mentioned, it is probably at least in part so that she can convince Reva to go to bed so that she can go to Foley's Woods.

We also see another example of the conflict that has existed within Sue during this entire story as she once again reaches out to her Christian faith to help her complete this one last act in the name of the Communist Party. At this point, her loyalty is not to the Party, but to her son and she is determined to do whatever she needs to in order to protect his pride.

Part 6

Part 6 Summary

Hiding the gun inside the sheet, Sue leaves her house and starts walking toward the woods. She crosses the creek at its lowest point and when she emerges on the other side, she sees the lights of the cars in the woods. She walks toward the men in silence, but before long, one of them sees her and asks her why she is there. Sue replies that she has come to retrieve her son. She clarifies her intent by telling them that the sheet she is carrying is to be used to wrap his body. Upon hearing this, one of the men tells Sue that Johnny-Boy isn't dead as of yet. When Sue tells him that she is sure he will eventually be killed, the man tells her that his life can be spared if he gives them the names of his comrades. Sue replies that she knows her son will not do this and so she is prepared for his death.

One of the men eventually takes Sue to see the sheriff. On their way, Sue resolves that she will stall as long as possible so that she can wait for Booker's arrival; once he does arrive, she will use the gun she is carrying to make sure he does not reveal the information she unwittingly provided him. This is the only way that Sue can think of to correct the mistake she made.

They finally reach the clearing were the sheriff is waiting with some other men. Noting the white sheet in Sue's arms, he tells her that he is glad that the beating he gave her earlier brought her to her senses. He then asks her again to give him the names of Johnny-Boy's comrades and, once again, Sue refuses. Rather than argue any longer, the sheriff brings Sue to a clearing where her son is lying in a puddle of mud. The sheriff tells her to go to her son, but she refuses. In an effort to get her to make Johnny-Boy talk, they prepare to break his legs. Sue stands in silence and wishes that Booker would arrive so that she can kill him, as well as the sheriff. The men give her one more opportunity to get Johnny-Boy to talk before they bring a crowbar crashing down on his knees, breaking them instantly.

As the crowbar breaks his legs, Johnny-Boy turns his face away from his mother. A few moments later, he turns back to her and asks her to leave. Sue still does not move and so the sheriff tells her that she better take this opportunity to speak to her son, because if she does not, the sheriff will split Johnny-Boy's eardrums and he will never be able to hear again. When Sue still does not move, the sheriff follows through on his threat.

As Sue stands looking at her wounded son, she wishes she could shoot him and free him from his pain, but she knows that if she draws the gun now, she will not be able to finish the task she came to complete. As she thinks about this, she becomes aware of commotion around her. She looks up to see Booker entering the clearing. He begins to tell the group that he got the names of the comrades from Sue, but he isn't given the chance to finish. With one shot, Sue kills him. She then tries to turn the gun on Johnny-Boy, but by this time, she has already been pinned down by some of the other men in

the clearing. As she suspects, the men decide to kill her, but they also decide to kill Johnny-Boy first. As Sue lies on the ground, she hears the shot that kills her son. A moment later, she feels another bullet enter her chest and, as she dies, she finds strength in knowing that she was able to remain strong and prevent the men from learning the names of her son's comrades.

Part 6 Analysis

As we have suspected from nearly the beginning of the story, Johnny-Boy is killed. The death of Sue, on the other hand, comes as a bit of a surprise. Her determination and resolve are displayed one final time as she summons every ounce of strength she has to walk to the spot where her son is being held. While she knows there is nothing she can do to prevent his death, she knows that with some patience and a good aim, she can prevent Booker from supplying the names of the other comrades to the sheriff.

While it may seem inconceivable for a mother to stand by and watch her son be tortured, Sue knows that the emotional pain her son would feel if the other members of the party were seized would be far greater. And so, out of love for her son, she stands quietly by and does not respond to the sheriff's demands.

As Sue passes from life into death, she finally feels peace and, in contrast to the dark night during which this story takes place, she focuses on an imaginary "bright and morning" star. The star is symbolic of Sue's passing into a new life where, as her Christian beliefs have taught her, she will enjoy the promise of Heaven. The "bright and morning star" referred to in the title is also a Christian symbol of Jesus Christ; thus Sue's decision to focus on this symbol in her last moments of life tells us that, despite everything that has happened to her, she has not abandoned her Christian beliefs. As she lays dying, Sue focuses on this star - Jesus Christ - and finally finds peace.

Characters

Booker

Booker is a white man who recently joined the Communist Party. He is such a new member that he does not know the name of the other people who belong to the party nor where they are planning their next meeting. Booker comes to Sue's house after she has been beaten by the sheriff. He helps Sue by giving her a cool, wet cloth to wipe her wounds. All the while he is assisting her, Booker questions Sue about the names of the other people who have joined the party.

After Booker leaves, Sue begins to doubt Booker's sincerity. Once Reva confirms that Booker is the turncoat, Sue hunts Booker down, and at the end of the story she shoots him in the head.

Johnny-Boy

Johnny-Boy is one of the two sons of Sue. The story opens with Sue waiting for Johnny-Boy, who is late in coming home. Johnny-Boy has taken up the slack in gaining membership in the local chapter of the Communist Party after the imprisonment of his brother, Sug.

Johnny-Boy is very quietly serious. He is driven by a mission: to liberate black people who have lived so many generations under the oppression imposed by white people. He does not necessarily like white people, but he does hold a ray of hope that if white people and black people can come together under the auspices of the Communist Party, then maybe blacks will be liberated. Toward this mission, Johnny-Boy risks his life and in the end sacrifices himself to the cause. He refuses, despite all the corporal punishment that is inflicted upon him, to name the secret members of the party. His actions reflect a vision that exceeds the personal. His life is not as important as the life of the party and its suggested rewards. His goal is freedom. If the only road to that freedom is death, he is willing to take it. However, he dies in a fashion that differs from the typical quiet black men of his past. Johnny-Boy has a vision of the future, and it is toward that goal that he gives up his life.

Reva

Reva is a young white woman. She is infatuated with Johnny-Boy, but the two never come into contact in the course of the story, symbolic of their ill-fated relationship. Reva is also a true believer, and she and her father help Johnny-Boy organize the Communist Party in their area.

Reva appears at Sue's doorstep in the middle of a rainstorm. She warns Sue that someone has told the sheriff about Johnny-Boy's activities. Sue, in turn, although she is

concerned about Reva's having to go back into the storm, tells Reva that she must return to her father's home to tell him that Johnny-Boy is late coming home and might not be able to warn the other members of the Community Party.

Later in the story, Reva returns to Sue's house, to find that Sue has been beaten. She helps nurse Sue, wiping her wounds, making her drink coffee. Then Reva tells Sue that she knows who the "Judas" is. It is upon Reva's conveying this information that Sue knows that she has to find Booker and kill him.

Sheriff

The sheriff appears with a group of rowdy white men at Sue's home. He and the group of men with him walk into Sue's house without being invited and begin to eat her food. When the sheriff calls Sue "Anty," she tells him, "White man, don you *Anty* me!" The sheriff has come because he suspects that Johnny-Boy is involved in the organizing of the Communist Party. This threatens the sheriff s power, and he wants to ask Johnny-Boy the names of all the members. The sheriff promises that if Johnny-Boy talks, his life will be spared.

Sue does not trust the sheriff, but she does not back down from him. She talks back to him to the point that the sheriff loses his patience. He feels insulted by Sue's boldness and beats her before leaving her home. The sheriff tells Sue that if Johnny-Boy doesn't talk, she had better bring a white sheet with her to wrap Johnny-Boy's body in.

Later in the story, when Sue goes looking for Booker, she runs into the sheriff, who is in the process of torturing Johnny-Boy. The sheriff orders the breaking of Johnny-Boy's legs, and then he crushes Johnny-Boy's eardrums. After Sue shoots Booker, the sheriff comes over and beats her again. Then he orders that his men shoot both Sue and Johnny-Boy.

Sue

Sue holds the main focus of the story. She is the mother of Johnny-Boy and Sug. Although the story is told with a third person narrator, it is through Sue's world that the tale unfolds. Keneth Kinnamon, writing in *The Emergence of Richard Wright,* describes Sue as having a "governing passion" that is maternal. In other words, she does what she has to do in the name (and love) of her sons.

Although her sons are inflamed with the need to create change in the rural southern countryside in which they were born, where racism sequesters them in a world of mortal fear, Sue is willing to take the punishment that is forced onto her, believing that she will be rewarded upon her death. Sue has a very strong Christian faith, and the image of Jesus suffering on his cross allows her to swallow her own pain in silence. She will one day go to heaven, and those who have inflicted wounds on her will one day suffer.

However, because of her strong maternal passions, she is infected with her sons' zeal in the promise of the newly formed Communist Party in their rural setting. As her sons struggle with their clandestine activities in order to gain membership (both white and black) for the party and thus strength through the party, Sue is caught between her beliefs that she should suffer in silence, distrust all white people, and simultaneously support, nurture, and protect her grown children.

As Sue becomes more deeply involved in her sons' activities to fight oppression through a united, communistic front, she gains an inner strength that is quite different from the spiritual, and somewhat submissive, strength that she has found in Christianity. Abdul JanMohamed writes in his article "Psychopolitical Function of Death in *Uncle Tom's Children,"* that Sue "is so sure of her strength that she fantasizes about her ability to prove her toughness." It is this factor that ultimately gets Sue into trouble. She almost romanticizes the act of confronting her dread, loathing, and fear of white people. She taunts the white sheriff until he beats her. This misfortune leaves her thoughts clouded, which ultimately forces her onto a path that can only end in death.

Sug

Sug is Sue's other son. Sug has been in jail for one year. He has been beaten, but so far he has not given away the names of the members of the Communist Party. Sug never appears in the story. Readers only learn about him through Sue's thoughts.

Themes

Racial Violence

Wright's story "Bright and Morning Star" begins with Sue standing at the window of her house, looking for her son, worried that he might have been caught by local officials and beaten. Sue's son is not doing anything illegal; he is merely trying to organize a group of oppressed people (mostly black people). Fearful of the power of African Americans, should they organize, white officials have terrorized black citizens, threatening physical abuse, torture, and ultimately death. One of Sue's sons has already been beaten and then thrown into jail because he would not tell the officials the names of everyone who had signed up to become members in the Communist Party.

Sue herself experiences racial violence when a group of white men enter her house without warrants or even without the customary politeness of knocking on her door. Once inside her house, they begin eating her food, and when she confronts them, they insult her. One white man throws Sue's food in her face and asks, "How they taste, ol [b—]?" When Sue talks back to the white men, one of them says, "You need somebody t teach yuh how t be a good nigger!?" A few minutes later, the sheriff, in an attempt to teach Sue to act according to his definition of how a black person should respond to a white person, punches her in the face, and when she falls down, he kicks her.

In the end, when Sue appears with a sheet in her arms to recover her son's body, the sheriff comments, "Looks like them slaps we gave yuh learned yuh some sense, didnt they?" When Sue refuses to ask her son to divulge the names, the sheriff orders his men to crush her son's legs with a crowbar. To confirm that the legs are broken, one of the men lifts one of the legs, which drops "rearward from the kneecaps." "Just lika broke sparrow wing," the man states. A few minutes later, the sheriff threatens to break the son's eardrums. One of his men confirms, "he knows how t do it, too!" Then another man states, "He busted a Jew boy tha way once! ?"

These passages are used to give a realistic portrayal of the conditions under which African Americans had to live. Because of the constant threat of racial violence, just as often coming from legal authorities as well as angry mobs, many blacks learned to submit to the degradation of unvarying humiliation at the hands of white people.

Martyrdom

Death is a theme that appears in most of Wright's works. In "Bright and Morning Star," death is portrayed as a form of martyrdom. Sue is proud of her sons' silence. She knows that her sons will not ever divulge the names of the people who are involved in the Communist Party. At one point Sue claims, "Po Sug! They sho musta beat the boy somethin awful! But, thank Gawd, he didnt talk! He ain no weaklin, Sug ain! Hes been lion-hearted all his life long." Sug is Sue's son, the one who has been in jail for a year.

Sue gets caught up in her sons' valiance, and when the sheriff threatens to beat her, she thinks, "There was nothing on this earth . . . that they could not do to her but that she could take." A little later, the narrator comments that Sue was willing to sacrifice her sons, knowing that they were as good as dead once the sheriff had them, because she wanted the sheriff and all the white people to know that "they could not get what they wanted by bluffing and killing." Then she thinks, exultingly, "N yuh ain gonna *never* git it!"

Wright's use of the word "exultingly" is telling. The word has overtones of rejoicing and being triumphant. It exposes Sue's (and thus Wright's) sense of offering up her sons' lives in the fight toward freedom. Her sons will die, and their deaths will symbolize the strength needed for others to face their white oppressors without fear. Their deaths are not random or wasted. They have suffered and died for a cause. As Wright's last words in this story emphasize, these martyrs are 'the dead that never die.'

Communism

The philosophy of the Communist Party offered hope to Wright. It was through the Communist Party that he met other radical intellectuals. It was also through the Communist publications that his first stories were set in print. The party's promise of strength through unionizing workers was very appealing. Workers' rights and financial security were privileges that Wright had never experienced. The dream of socialism, which the Communist Party proffered, inspired Wright to conceive of a time when all people would experience equality. It was toward these ends that Wright's works would take on the theme of socialism, especially as portrayed in "Bright and Morning Star," which put forth the concept that strength would be found if white people and black people could come together in a common cause.

Maternal Love

Although it might be argued that giving one's children up to a cause is a very different measure of maternal love, there is no doubt that Wright's protagonist, Sue, loves her children. Her life appears to be driven by her passion for them. She worries about their whereabouts. She considers their needs above her own. She even changes her philosophy of life to better align herself with her children's beliefs. By the end of the story, she has, in essence, become her sons, taking up their fervor, sacrificing her own life to protect their interests in the cause of organizing their people when their plight prohibits them from doing so. Her last words are "Yuh didnt git whut yuh wanted," from which the reader can infer that she made sure that her sons did not die in vain.

Style

Colloquialism

The dialog in Wright's "Bright and Morning Star" is written in a colloquial form, emphasizing the pronunciation of words uttered both by a stereotypical Southern person as well as by a stereotypical African American living in the South. Wright uses this form not only to portray the tone of the South but also because he believed in a very realistic documentation of life. If people talked with an accent, muffling words, skipping over consonants, then that is what he would write. Examples of the dialog as written are the words "yuh" for *you,* "astin" for *asking,* "ernuff' for *enough.*

Within this colloquialism is also the use of non-standardized English grammar. Examples include "Don yuh wish you knowed?" (for *Don't you wish you knew?);* "Yuh done did ernuff sass fer one night" (for *You have done enough sass for one night);* and "Whut she wans?" (for *What does she want?).* This type of dialog, if done carefully, pulls the reader into the setting. In the case of "Bright and Morning Star," Wright's use of colloquialism takes the reader into the rural South, a place that is somewhat exotic for many people. If he were to use this type of dialog throughout the story, it might be considered a bit heavy-handed. However, in most of the narration of the story, when Sue's thoughts are expressed, Wright uses standardized English, giving the reader a chance to flow with the story without having to translate the colloquialisms.

Suspense

Wright's stories are often criticized for their lack of fully fleshed out characters and complexity of plot. However, one characteristic of Wright's writing that most critics seem to agree on is his ability to create a tightly constructed psychological suspense in his narrative. Wright's story "Bright and Morning Star" is a perfect example of how masterful he is in creating a perfectly wrought tension in his writing. From the opening scene with Sue standing at the window waiting anxiously for her son Johnny-Boy to return home to the last few sentences of this story as Sue lies in the mud dying, the reader is held in check, wondering when the anticipated final blow will fall. Wright fills his story with fear, which affects his characters and his readers, in turn. And it is this fear that puts everyone on edge. Even if the ending of the story were known, or at least anticipated, Wright's direct and realistic depiction of pain and suffering make the reader first grimace and then wonder how much more his characters can and will endure. This question remains with the reader as the story unfolds and until the characters meet their doom.

Narration

Wright's story is narrated from a limited third person point of view. Readers are able to hear Sue's thoughts and see the action through Sue's eyes. They are not privy to the thoughts of any other character. Only through the dialog can the reader extrapolate the

thoughts of the other people in the story. By using this point of view, Wright focuses all the attention on his protagonist, Sue. It is her story. She explains to the readers the motivations of her sons. Whether her interpretation is accurate will never be known.

The narration is so closely linked to the protagonist that there is no consideration given as to whether the narrator is not Sue. In other words, it is not a narrator who is watching the story; it is the narrator of Sue's thoughts. For instance, when the narrator states that Sue "was consumed with a bitter pride," the reader does not question this statement. It is read as if Sue had come to this conclusion, and the reader is merely a witness to her realization.

Setting

The setting for this story is the rural South, probably during the 1920s or the 1930s when the Ku Klux Klan, Jim Crow laws, and frequent tortures and lynchings of African Americans were prominent. Although this story might have taken place in the North, as there certainly was racial violence there also, most people, at least in the United States, assume that it was in the South that this kind of activity took place. Due to the fact that Wright was raised in the South, he was more familiar with the social structure, the oppression, and the politics involved in living there. Trying to organize people and bringing white and black people together in order to do this were more dangerous endeavors in the South than in the North, thus giving his story a more dramatic edge.

Historical Context

The American Communist Party

The Communist Party, in the United States, was formed on September 1, 1919, in Chicago, Illinois. Having been inspired by the Russian Revolution (1917), unionists, intellectuals, and artists were attracted to the communist philosophy of helping oppressed people. During the 1930s, with most Americans feeling the effects of the Great Depression, the Communist Party's advocacy of unemployment insurance, social security, and the right of workers to organize, captivated the imaginations not only of the general public but also of many young and aspiring writers. The movement was strong enough that in 1932 William Z. Foster ran for president as a candidate of the Community Party.

Wright joined the party in 1932. Shortly after joining, he became the executive secretary of the Chicago branch of the John Reed Club, a left-wing cultural group sponsored by the Communist Party. The club afforded Wright the opportunity of meeting with other young, radical intellectuals and artists, helping him to define his own literary and social philosophy.

The themes of organizing workers and other oppressed groups of people in order to gain power against their aggressors mark much of Wright's early works. These themes were born with Wright's association with the Communist Party. Sometimes Wright's work, especially his journalistic work for socialist papers, was so imbued with communist themes that it sounded, according to critic Robert Felgar writing in the Preface to his *Richard Wright,* "as if it were dictated by a computer programmed by Marx himself."

Jim Crow Laws

So-called Jim Crow laws are any laws that implement racial segregation. Named for an old minstrel routine (Jump Jim Crow), the term Jim Crow laws reflects the Supreme Court decision *(Plessy v. Fergusson,* 1896) that upheld the Louisiana law that required separate but equal railroad facilities for blacks and whites. From this decision, white people in power in the South took it upon themselves to create other separate but equal laws for everything from public transportation to public education; the emphasis in the implementation of these so-called laws was on the word *separate* with a total disregard for the word *equal.*

The Scottsboro Case

Representative of social attitudes of whites toward blacks during the 1930s (predominantly, but not exclusively, in the South) are the circumstances of the Scottsboro case. In March 1931, on a train traveling through Alabama, a group of white

and black youths got into a fight. The white youths, having lost the fight and having been forced off the train by the black youths, reported the black youths to train officials. When the train stopped at the next station, nine black youths were rounded up and arrested.

Coincidentally, two white women were also arrested by the same officials for having crossed the state line for immoral purposes. In an attempt to dissuade the police from charging them, the women claimed that the black youths had raped them. Rape was, of course, a serious crime, but the rape of white women by black men was enough to cause whole southern communities to go on a lynching rampage. The black men were quickly jailed, accused, and all but one was sentenced to die in the electric chair.

The Communist Party, The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the American Civil Liberties Union all became interested in this case. They paid for lawyers who eventually appealed the convictions to the U.S. Supreme Court. In 1932, the Supreme Court ruled that the defendants had been denied a fair trial. Subsequently, there was a second trial in 1933 in which one of the women recanted her story. However, the jury still found the defendants guilty.

There were many other appeals and many other trials, but in the end five of the original nine men spent many years in jail, with the last of them being released on parole in 1950, nineteen years after having been tried for a crime he did not commit.

The Scottsboro case was considered a pivotal event in the Civil Rights movement. The NAACP gained quite a bit of publicity during the trials and gained strength as an organization. Formerly accused of aligning itself only with the bourgeois, the NAACP, through the Scottsboro case, redefined itself as the defender of all black Americans. The Scottsboro case also brought public attention to the poor ethics of the southern judicial system in reference to defending African Americans.

Marcus Garvey and Black Nationalism

Black nationalism is a term that has been applied to a movement among African Americans to fight against the dehumanizing conditions of slavery. Whereas socialism, in theory, would bring workers together to fight oppression, black nationalism proffered that black people should come together and create a separate society for themselves. Although the history of the movement is not well recorded, it is known that in 1916 the movement found a charismatic figurehead in the person of Marcus Garvey. Garvey formed a group he called the Universal Negro Improvement Association, which helped to develop black capitalist enterprises with a goal to build in Africa a black-governed nation. Garvey at one point claimed that there were about two million members in his organization, which would make this the largest mass movement of African Americans ever to occur.

Garvey, who was often referred to as Black Moses, often spoke of a "new Negro" who was proud of being black. He was successful in creating a chain of restaurants and

grocery stores, laundries, a hotel, and a printing press. Unfortunately, he was better at managing crowds than he was at managing business. Eventually, mismanagement of his affairs plus his doctrine of racial purity and separatism brought strong criticism his way from other influential black leaders. His popularity weakened, and in 1922 he was indicted for mail fraud. Garvey, although eventually deported from the United States, rekindled a movement that would continue after his departure. He had given African Americans a sense of pride about themselves and their culture, which would spread throughout the black community and eventually inspire other organizations such as the Nation of Islam.

Literary Movements

The Harlem Renaissance movement, which flourished in the decade of the 1920s, marked the emergence of a new confidence among African-American artists. Some of the writers associated with this movement include Jean Toomer *(Cane,* 1923), Langston Hughes *(Not without Laughter,* 1930), and Zora Neale Hurston *(Their Eyes Were Watching God,* 1937). Many other artists of this period were published in Alain Locke's *The New Negro* (1925), a collection of stories, artwork, and essays by African Americans who voiced a new sense of independence as well as a new definition of black identity. Wright's works appeared as the Harlem Renaissance was fading, and although some of the writers in this movement were considered his peers, Wright wanted to move beyond the Harlem Renaissance goal of defining an African-American identity. He wanted action, and his work is said to have inspired a new movement in African-American literature that became more politically motivated. It was driven by the urge for freedom as only a true civil rights program could deliver.

Wright wrote during the transition between the old movement of the Harlem Renaissance and the new group of works that would be termed the Black Arts movement of the 1960s and 1970s. He would influence many other writers during this transitional period, although not all of them would agree with his political views. Two of the more famous writers were Ralph Ellison, who wrote *Invisible Man* (1952), and James Baldwin, who wrote *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953).

Critical Overview

In the Introduction to *Uncle Tom's Children,* Richard Yarborough makes reference to, as he calls it, "an oft-quoted statement" of Wright's concerning this publication as a whole. Yarborough writes that Wright himself criticized this collection harshly by stating, "When the reviews of that book began to appear, I realized that I had made an awfully naive mistake. I found that I had written a book which even bankers' daughters could read and weep over and feel good about." For Wright, this was not a mark of good literature but rather a failure of his to arouse action. As a matter of fact, Yarborough continues by explaining that Wright's words were actually a criticism of the American public and "their capacity to defuse the potency of harsh critique through the very act of commercial consumption and subsequent emotional release. In other words, mainstream America (in particular white Americans) loved this book, but that was far from Wright's intentions.

Despite Wright's disappointment, the reaction to *Uncle Tom's Children,* on the whole, was somewhat overwhelming, with Eleanor Roosevelt, wife of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, even taking the time to comment on it. Originally published in 1938, *Uncle Tom's Children* did not include the story "Bright and Morning Star." The short story first was published, in the same year, in *The Masses,* a monthly socialist journal of arts and politics. It was not until 1940, after Wright's popular success with the publication of *Native Son* that "Bright and Morning Star" was included in an expanded edition of the collection.

Abdul JanMohamed states that the stories in *Uncle Tom's Children,* especially as reflected in "Bright and Morning Star," "not only accurately maps the relationship between emotions and their underlying sociopolitical causes and effects but also traces the trajectory of the thematic development of his short stories. The fear, aroused by racist oppression and by the need to struggle with racism . . . is one of the most significant emotions in the very construction of the black psyche." It is a theme, JanMohamed writes, that Wright returns to over and over again in each of his succeeding works. JanMohamed continues: "The story in effect examines the strength of the political resolve that Wright feels is necessary to carry on a successful struggle against oppression." JanMohamed believes that Wright "memorializes all his heroes whose voluntary deaths permit the author to find a way out of the realm of social death and toward the realm of a fuller life." He believes that Wright attempted, almost compulsively, to find his own way out of that realm of social death (caused by racism) through his writing. JanMohamed concludes that "Bright and Morning Star"' 'bears the fruits of the entire anthology *[Uncle Tom's Children]."*

Keneth Kinnamon believed that the story was overtly communist, causing Wright to have to force issues and metaphors that sometimes did not work. Kinnamon concludes that, for him, "Bright and Morning Star," despite the fact that it received critical honors, was "not a good story." Edward Margolies, commenting in his *The Art of Richard Wright,* might have agreed with Kinnamon. Margolies writes, "There is little the reader can do but sympathize with Wright's Negroes and loathe and despise the whites. There are no shadings, ambiguities, few psychological complexities." However, Margolies looks into

this a little deeper and asks, "How then account for their [the stories'] success?" He then expresses the thought that Wright is, after all, a storyteller and that:

his plots are replete with conflict, incident, and suspense. . . . He has an unerring 'feel' for dialogue, his narrations are controlled in terse, tense rhythms, and he manages to communicate mood, atmosphere, and character in finely worked passages of lyric intensity. But above all they are stories whose sweep and magnitude are suffused with their author's impassioned convictions about the dignity of man, and a profound pity for the degraded, the poor and the oppressed who, in the face of casual brutality, cling obstinately to their humanity.

Writing in 1991 for the *New York Times,* Alfred Kazin states that "Richard Wright was a most extraordinary writer." Kazin adds, "Wright was the novelist as thinker, not the thinker as novelist. . . . Truly, he was our native son, one of our best."

Criticism

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

Critical Essay #1

Hart has degrees in English literature and creative writing. Her published works are of literary themes. In this essay, Hart studies Wright's use of rain (and water) as a metaphor and as an effect on the mood of his short story.

Wright's short story "Bright and Morning Star" is filled with rain. From the first line, in which the protagonist Sue is said to be standing "six inches from the moist windowpane" as she wonders, "would it ever stop raining," Wright uses rain as a metaphor of gloom and sorrow. Sue is worried about her son Johnny-Boy's return. Although Wright does not show Sue crying, the moisture on the window so close to her face represents her tears, while her concern that the sun may never return addresses her apprehension that she has little hope that her life will ever improve. Thus, in the story's first sentence, Wright has set the tone for the entire story, and this mood will prevail to the end, with the rain, as Sue feared, never ending.

Wright uses rain not only as a metaphor; he takes the image of rain and wraps it around other symbols such as in the opening paragraph when he mentions "a bright shaft of yellow that swung from the airplane beacon in far off Memphis." It is because the night is so clustered in dark clouds and the sky is so saturated with rain that this yellow beacon is unmistakably visible. The shaft of light, in contrast to its practical status of signaling a safe harbor, cuts "through the rainy dark" like a "gleaming sword" above Sue's head. The rain not only emphasizes this image, it lends its sheets of water as symbolic material through which the beam cuts. If the rain were not present, the light would be diffused, its edges feathered, and therefore the image would be softened. With the presence of the rain, Wright has created a dark background through which the light takes on the menacing form of a weapon. With the "gleaming sword" hanging over Sue, Wright exposes Sue's fear as well as foreshadowing her death.

Sue is anxious about the well-being of her son. At first, readers might surmise that her anxiety is solely based on her concern that Johnny-Boy is caught in the rainstorm. He has "been trampin in this slop all day wid no decent shoes on his feet." Readers might assume that Sue is merely worried that Johnny-Boy might catch a cold. However, this is not the level of apprehension that Wright wants, so he raises tension by enlarging on Sue's thoughts as well as broadening the effects of the rainstorm. Not only is it raining, but it has been raining for too long. There is more rain than the ground can soak up. As Sue looks at the rain puddles that are forming in her yard, she observes that rain can be both good and bad. Rain can feed the earth and make plants flourish, but it can also "bog things down lika watah-soaked coffin." With this reflection, Sue again brings the element of death into the story. Wright, through Sue, is portraying rain as an image of sorrow that can help create a strong character in people, just as the rain can feed the earth. Grief can help people to learn to appreciate the benefits of life, but too much heartache and anguish can eventually kill the spirit.

Rain pervades this initial setting, as even the inside of Sue's house is saturated with moisture and images of water. There is the "filmy veil of sweat" on Sue's forehead, the

"throaty bubble" from a pot of boiling water, and the "pile of damp clothes" that Sue must iron. As she irons, she reminisces about both of her sons as "a gust of wind dashed rain against the window." Sue's life appears inundated with sorrow. As she unconsciously completes her chores, her hands follow "a lifelong ritual of toil" while her mind follows the suffering she has endured in the loss of her husband, in the suffering of her son Sug, and finally in her worries about Johnny-Boy's late return. Sue's trials in life have left her in a state of constant fear, which Wright further describes as an "intense brooding" that she held so closely to her "that she could feel their grain, like letting cold water run over her hand from a faucet on a winter morning." Water also figures in Sue's attempts to help support her sons. She washes clothes for white people. She mentions walking across a wet field with a load of wet clothes upon her head. This load did not weigh her down until the day that she found out that Sug had been taken to jail and beaten. Ever since, "things were becoming heavier. The tubs of water and the wet clothes were "becoming harder to lift."

The rain continues as Sue hears footsteps "sucking in the mud of the back yard." Sue is overpowered by the sound of these footsteps as she continues to anticipate her son's arrival. "With all the rain and fear" in the air, Sue's eyes fill with tears. Wright has created so much rain that the earth becomes soggy and grabs at the feet of those who are trying to make their passage home. This is a different type of weight than the water-laden clothes that Sue has carried on her head. With this image, the soaked earth makes footsteps heavy by "sucking" on the feet of those who pass by. It is hard to move, hard to progress when rain falls so heavily. Wright also incorporates more than sorrow into the rain. He now also links the rain with fear, and Sue has temporarily lost her ability to distract herself as she breaks down into tears.

Johnny-Boy finally makes it home. Sue feeds him and lets him "get dry" before she tells him that he has to go out into the rain again. She wants to give her son a moment of peace. As best as she can, she allows him to enjoy a short period of time when he still believes that hope is alive. In allowing him to dry off, Sue is temporarily lifting the weight of sorrow from his shoulders. Although she senses the fate that is soon to come down on him, she wants to give him the gift of motherly love. Then she says, without turning to look at him: "Yuh almos dry." This statement signifies to Johnny-Boy that "more was coming." In other words, having enjoyed his short respite, Johnny-Boy must once again return to the rain. When Johnny-Boy leaves, Sue watches the "rain take him." Then she goes to bed and listens to the rain, her feelings coursing "with the rhythm of the rain: Hes gone! Lawd, Ah *know* hes gone!"

In part 3 of the story, the sheriff and a group of his men come to Sue's house. During this whole section, there is no mention of rain. The dialog and action are hot and angry. Sorrow and fear have been put aside. In their place comes violence and blood. The rain remains absent when Booker, another white man associated with the sheriff, appears. Although fear is mentioned, it has become a white mountain of fear. It is different from the anxiety that Sue experiences when she thinks about her children. It is not the same fear as represented by rain. Not until Reva, a young white woman who is in love with Johnny-Boy, arrives on the scene is the rain made visible again.

As Sue ponders what she has to do to stop Booker from giving the sheriff the names of all the members of the Communist Party that Johnny-Boy has signed up, she notices that "the yellow beacon continued to flit past the window and the rain still drummed." She finds herself "mired . . . between two abandoned worlds, living, but dying without the strength of the grace that either gave." Then she feels something well up from deep inside of her and simultaneously senses that she is "naked against the night, the rain, the world." It is at that moment that she knows she must "wade the creek" and get to Booker before Booker reveals the names. The watery images that Wright uses at this point convey a variety of messages. With the yellow beacon and the rain still imposed, Wright reminds readers that that gleaming sword still hangs over Sue's head. Sue senses her own death. Standing in the darkness, Sue is "mired" in a place that is neither here nor there. She is not truly living because she is in a state of shock. Yet, she is not truly dead because she has not completed her fateful task. She accepts her fate, knowing that the things of this world are no longer significant. Naked, she will cross the creek, a symbol of crossing into the afterlife.

Walking toward the creek, Sue leans "her body against the wind and the driving rain." Although the wind and rain are pushing her back, she uses them to lean on, driving herself forward into it. When she reaches the creek, she studies it, looking for a low point. She steps into the water but does not feel it until the water rises halfway up her body. She gasps at the unexpected coldness, a coldness that soon will be repeated in the last lines of the story as she lies dying in the rain.

Sue arrives at the place where the sheriff is holding Johnny-Boy. Wright does not describe the scene in terms of rain. It is not mentioned that the men are wet from standing in the storm. Not until the sheriff takes Sue to see Johnny-Boy does Wright once again mention rain. "They led her to a muddy clearing. The rain streamed down through the ghostly glare of the flashlights." In a pool of black rainwater lies Sue's son.

Through the section of the story during which the sheriff and his men torture Johnny-Boy, Wright again does not mention rain. Only after Sue has killed Booker and after she has been pushed down into the mud does the rain reappear. "She lay without struggling, looking upward through the rain. . . . And she was suddenly at peace." It is then that Sue hears three shots fired, two at her son; the third shot she feels as a "streak of fire that tore its way through her chest [and] forced her to live again, intensely." Then she feels her flesh turning cold, "cold as the rain that fell from the invisible sky upon the doomed living and the dead that never dies." In death, Wright implies, Sue has found life. She has died a good death. The rain that once bothered her, that made her cold and bound her life in sorrow, is over. She has nothing more to fear. The rain, although it continues to fall, is meant for other people now.

Source: Joyce Hart, Critical Essay on "Bright and Morning Star," in *Short Stories for Students,* The Gale Group, 2002.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay excerpt, Williams explores how Wright uses the "mammy" character of Aunt Sue to represent the capability of black women to achieve social change.

"Bright and Morning Star" is one of the most deft and moving renderings of a black woman's experience in the canon of American literature. Writing while he was still a staunch believer in communism as the hope of the world's oppressed. Wright was able to achieve in this story a synthesis of ideology and literary expression that he was only occasionally able to equal in later, longer works. The mute Lulu, the childish wanton Sarah in "Long Black Song," May, the stereotyped and scary wife of the hero in "Fire and Cloud": these characterizations of black women are somewhat redeemed in the character of Aunt Sue. Yet, paradoxically, Wright's loving characterization also reinforces the image of the black woman as a symbol of the reactionary aspects in Afro-American tradition implicit in the preceding three stories.

Aunt Sue is a blend of the mother of Afro-American ideal and the mammy of American experience. She takes in washing for a living, carrying the hundred-pound baskets on her head; her most characteristic pose—when she is not ironing— standing with her "gnarled black hands folded over her stomach," is one of familiar humbleness. This pose later helps her to hide a gun and so is akin to the minstrel mask and the vaudeville grin as one of the disguises forced upon black people and made "renegade" through sly acts of self-assertion. Sue is, to use the jargon of the day, a "single" parent (I have often wondered what a double or triple parent looks like), a widow who has raised her sons, Sug and Johnny Boy, to manhood alone. She has struggled against being engulfed in poverty and racism, aided by her wits and, more importantly, an abiding faith in Jesus Christ as Lord of Heaven and Savior of the world. Personal service on whites, endurance, a necessary self-effacement, a truncated family structure—these factors so characterize our conception of the so-called matriarch that they have in the aggregate almost the quality of archetype. Certainly the character of Aunt Sue approaches the ideal. Yet Sue is also a dynamic character who in Wright's treatment rises above the social definition of *mammy.*

When Sug and Johnny Boy enter manhood and "walk forth demanding their lives," Sue has the strength to let them go. Her heart follows them as they become organizers, for she loves, as mother must, but she loves without smothering. Her love for her sons leads Sue to embrace the work of the Party; the wrongs and sufferings of black men "take the place of Him nailed to the Cross as the focus of her feelings," giving meaning to her life of toil as Christianity had before. In the party, Sue becomes aware of a kind of personal strength and pride that no one, least of all herself, thought a "black woman . . . could have:" the will to work against the racist power structure. We understand, of course, that Aunt Sue has willingly subsumed her own aspirations, her own personality under first one man, Jesus Christ, then another, the wronged heroic Black Man, that she would consider the wrongs done to her as a black woman negligible compared to what black men suffer. She believes that righting the wrongs of black men will automatically

eliminate her own exploitation. This elementary conception of black liberation does not trouble us unduly; Wright subtly implies his own deeper understanding of the political situation of women when he explains why it is natural for Reva, a young white woman comrade, to trudge through a downpour to deliver an urgent message—"Being a woman, Reva was not suspect; she would have to go." He probably takes a devilish delight in portraying that symbol of deadly femininity, the white woman, using her privileged position to strike at his white male oppressors.

Yet, despite the changes wrought in her attitude by the new light shed by the party, Sue never quite accepts its dictum that she "'not see white n [she] not see black.'" She cannot entirely discard the teachings of her experience: "'You can't trust ever white man yuh meet.'" Johnny Boy's position, "'Yuh can't judge folks by how yuh feel bout em n by how long yuh don knowed em,'" is, of course, the correct party line. And though in this instance, Sue proves correct (the informer is one of the newly recruited white party members), Sue's insistence upon "pitting her feelings against the hard necessity of his [Johnny Boy's] thinking" symbolizes the hold that the old life and the old ways still have over her.

A white man posing as a friend of the little band of party members tricks her into revealing the names of the local group, even as Johnny Boy is captured by the sheriff's posse. Carrying a sheet for his burial, Aunt Sue gains access to the place where Johnny Boy is held captive, the place to which the informer must return to lay his information before the sheriff. Sue is forced to watch while Johnny Boy is tortured. She considers killing him to spare him pain, but chooses to wait and kill the informer and so save the lives of all the other comrades. She succeeds in killing the informer and is herself killed. She dies with a defiant cry, "'You didn't git what you wanted!'" on her lips.

That defiant cry is ironic for these are the words of defiance that precipitated the crisis in the first place. They reinforce the quality of noble hubris that is an important part of her characterization. "'Ah just want them white folks t try t make me tell *who* is *in* the party n who *ain!. . .* Ahll show em something they never thought a black woman could have,'" she tells Johnny Boy early on in the story. And she is given a chance to show that something. The sheriff and his men come looking for Johnny Boy and refuse to leave when she orders them out of her house. Despite her uppitiness, the sheriff seeks to be conciliating: "'Now Anty . . .'" he begins, only to be brought up short by Sue's retort, "'White man don yuh *Anty* me!'" She rejects the bogus conciliation and the counterfeit respect the title implies; and rejects also *the place* in which that title puts her. In the ensuing exchange of words with the white men, she further demonstrates her pride and courage:

"'Twenty of yuh runnin over one ol woman! Now ain yuh white men glad yuh so brave?'" The sheriff slaps her, for she is not to him a woman, but a nigger woman, a beast of burden to be beaten when it proves recalcitrant. As Aunt Sue does: She refuses to tell them anything about Johnny Boy. Balked, the sheriff and his men start to leave. Sue, wanting to drive home her victory for she has shown that there is nothing they could do to her that she could not take, taunts them as they go out her door. "'Yuh didn't git wht

yuh wanted! N yuh ain gonna nevah git it!'" This so enrages the sheriff that he beats her senseless.

While Sue is dazed from the assault, Booker, whom she suspects of being an informer, seduces her into telling the names of her comrades ("'Is yuh scared a me cause Ahm *white?'"* he demands indignantly; then, cleverly invoking her son's name, "'Johnny Boy ain like tha.'") Later, after Reva has confirmed her suspicions that Booker is the informer, Sue reflects, pinpointing her moment of transcendent strength as the moment of her blind fall. "She put her finger upon the moment when she had shouted her defiance to the sheriff, when she had shouted to feel her strength . . . If she had not shouted at the sheriff, she would have been strong enough to resist Booker; she would have been able to tell the comrades herself," instead of entrusting the task to the traitor.

But hubris is only the superficial flaw. The "fit of fear" that had come upon her when she regained consciousness and discovered herself looking into a white face was "a part of her life she thought she had done away with forever." But that part of her life, "the days when she had not hoped for anything on this earth," had been evoked through her singing of the old sorrow songs, the spirituals that she "'can't seem to fergit,'" in the first part of the story. And in singing, she has opened herself to both the tragic expression of pride and that old-timey fear. She sang for the traditional reason, "to ease the anxiety [about Johnny Boy's safety] that was swelling in her heart." She had thought that it meant no more than this when she sang now. But the events of the evening reveal that the songs are not, even now, an empty symbol. She has almost, without knowing it, called on Jesus; and He had not answered. This is the "deeper horror": the fight for black men's freedom had not truly replaced Christ in her heart. This realization mires her temporarily between two worlds, neither of which she seems able to abandon or live in.

In succumbing to the fit of fear induced by Booker's presence, Sue has in her own mind reverted to type, to the stereotypical image of the servile, cringing slave. And she is ashamed of herself and even more "shamed whenever the thought of Reva's love crossed her mind." In the white girl's trust and acceptance of her, Sue has found her first feelings of humanity, and Reva's love draws her toward a reintegration and reaffirmation with the peoples of the earth. Reva's relationship to Aunt Sue is a re-reading of the conventional one between mammy and mistress. It represents the ideal solidarity possible between black and white workers and the sisterhood between women workers. Moreover, the black mother and the white girl are bound together by their love for Johnny Boy. Reva's love for Sue, her faith in the old black woman, represent for Sue the promise of the party made real in a genuine human relationship. That love is likened to the light from the airport beacon in far-off Memphis that in the story becomes a metaphor for the new day that communism will bring.

Sue's pride before the white girl causes her to shield Reva from any knowledge of the mistake she has made, and this is consistent with the literal, denotative level of the story. Sue has already lost one son, Sug, to "the black man's struggle." He is in jail. Johnny Boy, she realizes during the sheriff's visit, is as good as gone; he will either be jailed, killed, or forced to flee because of his work with the party. Reva "was all she had

left." Thus, when the young white girl comes to her house, after the sheriff and Booker have left, she cannot bring herself to reveal the full extent of her weakness. Reva's confidence ("'An Sue! Yuh always been brave. Itll be awright!'") seems to mock her. It also goads her into thinking of a way to rectify her mistake. Ironically, this deception recalls the outline of the old mammy-mistress relationship, for one of the unacknowledged but understood tasks of the old family retainers—whether "Aunty" or "Uncle"—was to guide their young charges through the shoals of adolescence, shielding them from as much unpleasantness as possible and ministering to their hurts when it was not possible to keep them from pain. This latent aspect of Sue's love for Reva is reinforced by the suggestion of Reva as a sleeping beauty at the end of Section V of the story. Reva has come to spend the night with Sue in case there is trouble. She stays, even though the trouble has already come. Sue, resolved upon a course of action, gets Johnny Boy's gun and a sheet. Reva is in the room "sleeping; the darkness was filled with her quiet breathing . . . [Sue] stole to the bedside and watched Reva. Lawd, hep her!" Sue then steals away on her deadly errand, leaving Reva asleep, Reva's trust in black people intact, her world unshaken.

Concomitant with re-reading the relationship between mammy and mistress is the explicit sanctioning of romantic love between black men and white women as a symbol of racial equality and economic justice. Long before Sue gives Johnny Boy up to physical death in the service of the party, she gives him up to Reva. "The brightest glow her heart had ever known was when she had learned that Reva loved Johnny Boy"—this despite the fact that she knows the two of them "'couldna been together in this here south,'" to put it mildly. (We cannot help but remember the fate of Big Boy and his friends, the mob in "Down by the Riverside"— "'Did he *bother* you Mrs. Heartfield? The Little girl? Did he *bother* you *then* ?'") Yet Sue's approval of the match is used consistently to demonstrate that Sue has broken with her old outlook and embraced a new one, that she has broken with her old allies and found new ones. Sue never draws back from her approval of the match, whereas she early shows that she cannot accept all of the party tenets without reservation and her "Lawd hep" 's are a kind of subconscious refrain through much of the story. Sue's last thought as she starts out with her winding sheet is of Reva: "Lawd hep her! But maybe she was better off .. . she wont nevah know. Reva's trust would never be shaken." And as Sue starts across the fields holding the gun and the sheet against her stomach, "'Po Reva . . . po critter . . . Shes fast ersleep.'"

Reva is fast asleep to Johnny Boy's fate, to Sue's frailty, Sue's humanity, to the dark realities and hardships of black life. Despite the exigencies of life in the party, nothing has happened to disturb Reva's faith in human nature, the party, her belief in the perfectibility of the world. And it is as much to keep this white world intact as it is to redeem her own self-esteem that Aunt Sue sets out to hunt down the informer.

In "Bright and Morning Star," Wright articulates a dream of rapprochement between the old and the new Negro, between the generations spawned in the bloody reprisals of Reconstruction and the generation nurtured on radical ideology in the new century, between black woman and white. He uses "the most beloved and familiar character" in American experience, the mammy, to inveigh against adherence not only to the

substance but to the form of the folk culture, to urge a complete break with the old-fogeyish past. The hope implicit in the story—if this old woman can change, any one can—is never realized in portrayals of younger black women. Indeed, an episode from *American Hunger* (1977), the posthumously published sequel to *Black Boy,* illustrates how completely Wright came to equate black women and black culture with the reactionary and regressive.

Source: Sherley Anne Williams, "Papa Dick and Sister-Woman: Reflections on Women in the Fiction of Richard Wright," in *American Novelist Revisited: Essays in Feminist Criticism,* edited by Fritz Fleischmann, G. K. Hall & Co., 1982, pp. 394-415.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, Oleson explores various symbols and their significance in "Bright and Morning Star."

Richard Wright manages to introduce most of his important symbols in the first five hundred words of his story, while catching up the reader in a mother's anxiety over the late return of her son. Rain forms the ever-present back-drop of the story and we are made aware of its monotonous presence in the first sentence. "Rains good n bad," Aunt Sue mumbled, "It kin make seed bus up thu the groun, er it kin bog things down lika watah-soaked coffin." Rain is literally and symbolically the pressure of adversity. Adversity has made her strong, keenly aware of life, resourceful. It has also bogged her down in inescapable poverty and political oppression which deprives her of her sons and of life itself.

The airplane beacon flashing through the wet darkness is like a flash of hope that keeps her going. *"Don give up hope.* Yeah; we gotta live in hope." The song of her childhood equating Jesus with the "Bright n Mawnin Star" links the title to the beacon, to song itself, and begins to form a cluster of shifting hopes that she has anchored her soul to over the years.

The "rich black earth sprawling outside in the night," the clay which could not soak up such an interminable quantity of rain, is a perfect symbol for black people in America. To make the meaning inescapable, the earth is even personified in the image of a man sprawling, as if knocked down, and cast outside, away from light and warmth.

We reminisce with Aunt Sue as the song pulls her back to the vision of Christianity that sustained her in her youth. But the sense of security that it gives us is destroyed by the intrusion of the cold white mountain, explicitly identified as the white folks and their laws. The rain, the beacon, the earth may be natural, subconscious symbols to her, but the mountain image is fully conscious and unnatural, for there is no actual mountain there, as there are actually rain, earth, and beacon before her eyes. The white mountain clearly does not belong, is not in a sense real. It has physical reality only when her will permits it power over her. But at the beginning of the story, the white mountain is painfully real, jutting up from and dominating over the black earth.

She recalls the period of her life when the bright-and-morning-star Jesus became instead the bright-and-morning-star Communist Party. "The wrongs and sufferings of black men had taken the place of Him nailed to the Cross; the meager beginnings of the party had become another Resurrection." In another sense, however, the conversion was a reversion to the original perception. "Him nailed to the Cross" would have appealed to her as a symbol of the suffering of her people. She merely reverts from the symbol to the reality. The Resurrection had been a symbol of the hope for a new freedom for her people. The Party offers not a mystic other-word reward won by patience and long-suffering, but a practical plan for forcefully making another world out of the one we have.

After Reva's arrival the beacon is identified with Reva' s love for Aunt Sue. "In Reva' s trust and acceptance of her she had found her first feelings of humanity; Reva's love was her refuge from shame and degradation. If in the early days of her life the white mountain had driven her back from the earth, then in her last days Reva's love was drawing her toward it, like the beacon shows air-borne bodies the way through the rain clouds back to the earth. The warm yellow light of white persons' love can show the black person who is cut off from his black heritage the way back to self-respect and self-acceptance. But it comes as something of a shock that Aunt Sue with all of the strength developed through struggle and the strength of her hatred of the white oppressor should be unable to feel her own humanity, which was denied by the whites, until one of *them* recognizes her human worth. The beacon, white peoples' love, is a source of hope, but it is not absolutely necessary for salvation. The beacon is not present in the last scene of the story.

The earth symbol deepens beyond simple identification with black people to include their courage, pride, and defiance. "She stood on a narrow plot of ground from which she would die before she was pushed. And then it was, while standing there, feeling warm blood seeping down her throat, that she gave up Johnny-Boy, gave him up to the white folks. . . . She gave him up because she wanted them to know that they could not get what they wanted by bluffing and killing."

What the white man thinks is of utmost importance to her and it is her tragic flaw. The surprising superlative of the discovery of Reva's love for Johnny-Boy being the "brightest glow her heart had ever known" reinforces the weight of white folk's opinion first revealed by the importance of Reva's respect for her. Now the action of the story hinges on Aunt Sue's compulsion to make the white sheriff and his men *know* that they can not forcibly take anything from her, to make them "feel the intensity of her pride and freedom." Her shouted defiance brings her the blow and kicks that incapacitate her for the job she has to do and make it necessary for her to entrust it to Booker, the spy. She had maintained her human dignity throughout the encounter with the savages in her kitchen. She knew that she was proud and free, but self-knowledge was not enough for her. White man had to be made to know it, too. Concern for white man's opinion undid her. As she realized, too late:

She had lost Sug to save others; she had let Johnny-Boy go to save others; and then in a moment of weakness that came from too much strength she had lost all. If she had not shouted to the sheriff, she would have been strong enough to have resisted Booker; she would have been able to tell the comrades herself.

Moreover, the defiant gesture was totally lost on them; they were much too obtuse to understand its significance.

The mountain image is closely associated with Booker when she is reacting to feeling and not to reason. Reason tells Aunt Sue to trust him, but when his fingers press into her arm, she felt "as though the white mountain was pushing her to the edge of a sheer height." Instinctive reaction proves true; he does force her to decisions of desperation.

As she gives Booker the names of Party members, she experience "a mounting horror of feeling herself being undone." As the rich black earth can be ravaged and find within itself the ability to restore itself, Aunt Sue, injured and heart-sick, finds the physical strength, the will and mental resourcefulness to outwit the sheriff's men. The star takes on new meaning, not the big generalized meanings of systems of belief - Christianity and Communism - but a very personal, specific meaning: "If she could only stop [Booker] some way! That was the answer, the point, the star that grew bright in the morning of new hope." All that she had learned from her life of dedication to visions became focused on this one last great task.

The clearer she felt it the fuller did something well up from the depths of her for release; the more urgent did she feel the need to fling into her black sky another star, another hope, one more terrible vision to give her the strength to live and act.

She was "naked against the night, the rain, the world"; she had betrayed her vision. Then a plan came to her: "The sheet! thas it, the *sheet!* Her whole being leaped with will; the long years of her life bent toward a moment of focus, a point." Again, the plan to save the comrades is thought of in star-like terms. Now she does not need to make the white men aware of her defiance; she will "go lika nigger woman" for only humility will enable her to the traitor. "She stood straight and smiled grimly; she had in her heart the whole meaning of her life; her entire personality was poised on the brink of a total act."

Her life's meaning is focused on the point of a bright star - one act that will cost her her life but will giver her the life of one enemy - one act that will inspire others with hope, for she will help prove that individual courage can level the white mountain, one white rock at a time, can destroy the power white people have over black will in one sweep. The bright and morning star is the supreme courage (bright) and hope (morning) of one old work-worn, careworn "nigger woman."

It was still important that she live up to Reva's trust; the beacon is flashing, feeding the light of her window where Reva lies sleeping as Aunt Sue sets out. She carries out her plan with her last reserve of physical and moral strength, towering above the morally degenerate posse of white citizens.

"Kill the [b-]!"

"Ah *thought* somethin wuz wrong bout her!"

"Ah wuz fer given it t her from the firs!"

" Thas whut yuh git for treatin a nigger nice!"

"Treating a nigger nice" means taunting her while torturing her son before her eyes. Fairness means allowing Booker's friend to be the one to shoot Aunt Sue. But Aunt Sue's greatness can never be appreciated by minds so small. They will never understand that they didn't take her life from her, that she gave it up of her own will before they could, just as she gave up Johnny Boy before they could take him from her.

The white mountain was only in her mind; she had the power to take away the white man's power over her:

She lay without struggling, looking upward through the rain at the white faces above her. And she was suddenly at peace; they were not a white mountain now; they were not pushing her any longer to the edge of life. Its awright. . . .

Source: Carole W. Oleson, "The Symbolic Richness of Richard Wright's 'Bright and Morning Star,'" in *Negro American Literature Forum,* Vol. 6, No. 4, Winter 1972, pp. 110-12.

Adaptations

Wright's famous novel *Native Son* was produced as a play on Broadway in 1941. Wright wrote the script along with Paul Green. Orson Welles directed. The play starred Canada Lee.

Native Son also was made into two motion pictures. Wright wrote the screenplay and played the lead role for the 1951 production, with Pierre Chenal directing. In 1986, Jerrold Freedman directed an updated version for Cinecom Pictures and American Playhouse (PBS).

In 1995, a full-length documentary on Wright's life entitled *Richard Wright—Black Boy* and produced by Madison Davis Lacy, aired on Mississippi Educational Television and the Independent Television Service (ITVS). The program won a Southeast Regional Emmy.

Both *Native Son* (read by James Earl Jones) and *Black Boy* (read by Brock Peters) are available from Caedmon Audio Cassette as tapes, or they can be downloaded at http://www.audible.com/ (last accessed February, 2002).

Topics for Further Study

Wright's "Bright and Morning Star" takes place outside of Memphis, Tennessee, probably in the 1930s. Research the history of this city during this time frame to find stories about incidents of racial violence. Were there any crimes recorded against African Americans? What were they? How were the defendants treated? What was the racial breakdown of the population of prisoners in Tennessee at this time?

Write a paper about the Communist Party in the United States. How active was the party in American politics? Were there any candidates in U. S. Senate races or the U. S. House of Representatives? What were the major causes of the party during the 1930s and 1940s? Were any of these causes taken up by other organized groups?

Research the disenfranchised African-American voters in Florida during the 2000 presidential election. Then create a short story as Wright might have written it, using his style and tone of voice. The story does not have to match historical events, but make it relevant to modern times. Focus on one person's specific and personal frustrations with the voting that year.

James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison were Wright's contemporaries. At one time, Ellison even considered Wright his mentor. Find out what happened to these relationships. How did they begin? When and how did they fall apart? What were the differences between these men? Be as objective as possible, showing both, or all three, sides of the arguments and their different political philosophies as well as their literary philosophies.

In Chicago during the 1990s, several black men were released from jail after investigators discovered evidence that these men had been sentenced for crimes they did not commit. Research one of these cases and write about it. The story could be told as a journalistic article, a short story, a poem, or the lyrics to a song.

Wright published a collection of haiku. Research the history of haiku, including the definition and format. Then write your own collection of ten haiku. The topics of the haiku do not all have to concern themselves with social issues, but try to include at least one that deals with racism.

Compare and Contrast

1930s: Mary McLeod Bethune becomes the first African-American woman to receive a major appointment from the U.S. government when she is appointed the director of Negro Affairs of the National Youth Administration.

1950s: Jackie Robinson is named director of communications for NBC (National Broadcasting Company), becoming the first black executive of a major radio-TV network.

1990s: Oprah Winfrey becomes the first black woman to own her own television and movie production company.

1930s: Unemployment reaches as high as 25 percent of the total U.S. population as the effects of the Great Depression set in. A loaf of bread costs $.09.

1950s: The U.S. economy prospers after World War II, and there is only a 2 percent unemployment rate. A loaf of bread costs $. 14.

1990s: The U.S. economy enjoys another prosperous decade as the stock market rises and the country has an overall unemployment rate of 4 percent. A loaf of bread costs anywhere between $1.50 and $4.00, depending on whether it contains conventional or organic ingredients.

1930s: Jim Crow laws, fashioned on the mistaken interpretation of the "separate but equal" ruling of *Plessy v. Fergusson* (1896), are used to fortify strict segregation in the United States, especially in the South. Everything from movie theaters to drinking fountains is specifically designated as either available for use by whites or by blacks. Public schools are segregated.

1950s: The Supreme Court rules that segregated schools are unconstitutional in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas,* setting the stage for a massive desegregation of all U.S. public schools.

1990s: Busing is still in effect in all U.S. states in a continuing effort to keep schools integrated. However, the system does not always work, leaving poorly funded inner-city schools to struggle with a lack of textbooks and computer access while wealthier suburban schools flourish. Since the majority of inner-city populations are black, African-American children tend to receive a poorer education than their white counterparts.

1930s: Chief legal counsel of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Charles Houston lays the groundwork for a campaign throughout the South to end racial violence.

1950s: Harry T. Moore, a leading NAACP organizer, and his wife are brutally murdered in Florida, setting off a decade of renewed white terrorism in the South. In Mississippi,

Emmett Till is murdered for allegedly whistling at a white woman. His murderers are brought to trial and acquitted.

1990s: Three white men in Texas chain James Byrd Jr., an African American, to the back of their pickup truck and drag him to his death. Two of the accused are given the death sentence. The third will spend his life in jail.

What Do I Read Next?

Sister Carrie (1900) by Theodore Dreiser was instrumental in influencing Wright's writing style. It was Dreiser's first novel, and some critics call it his best. This book did not receive the level of popularity that *An American Tragedy* would later enjoy, and its distribution was even suppressed until 1912 because of its female character's defiance of conventional sexual morality. The book tells the story of a young, small-town girl who runs away to New York and both uses and is used by men on her way to becoming a successful actress. This novel is said to have been the first masterpiece of the American naturalistic movement and is credited with being the model for subsequent American writers of realism.

Kingsblood Royal (1947) by Sinclair Lewis is a portrait of a successful white man who discovers that he is part black. Neil Kingsblood is a typical middle-class American with a comfortable life until he discovers his roots. This was a very shocking issue at the time of publication, and even though times have changed, the issues presented in this story are still being discussed today. Since Lewis's writing was a great influence on Wright, this is a good book to read.

In 1953, James Baldwin wrote *Go Tell It on the Mountain,* a story that spans only one day and covers the spiritual and moral awakening of a young teenaged boy. The story reflects on the effects of poverty on an urban, African-American family during the Great Depression. A contemporary of Wright, Baldwin disagreed with Wright's ideology. This book is semi-autobiographical and offers a good contrast to Wright's style.

Ralph Ellison, also a contemporary of Wright, wrote *Invisible Man* (1952). This first novel tells the story of a nameless narrator who grows up in the South but eventually finds his way to New York City. As he struggles with racism, both Southern and Northern style, the narrator searches for what he thinks is truth. However, he finds this concept very elusive. This work won the National Book Award for Ellison and remains an American classic.

Native Son (1940) is Wright's first published novel. The main character, Bigger Thomas, a young man living in Chicago during the 1930s, tries to rise above poverty and racism but becomes entrapped in a sequence of horrific events. It is a book about the effects of poverty and what it means to be black in America. Most critics believe that this is Wright's most powerful work.

Black Boy (1945) is Wright's autobiography of his early years in the rural South. It tells the story of a young boy growing up in an oppressive environment where Jim Crow laws and poverty make it all but impossible for an African-American male to exist. It is a criticism of racism as well as a coming-of-age story.

Wright's *Twelve Million Black Voices, a Folk History of the Negro in the U.S.* was first published in 1941 and depicts the lives of black people during the 1940s, showing the

harsh realities of living in crowded, run-down farmhouses in rural America and the challenges that families struggling in the inner city faced.

Further Study

Carter, Dan T., *Scottsboro: A Tragedy of the American South,* Louisiana State University Press, 1979.

Carter carefully reconstructs the ill-fated path that led several young, black men to prison for a crime that they did not commit. This controversial case, which eventually made its way to the Supreme Court, reverberates with the details of a judicial system gone bad.

Gates, Henry Louis, and K. A. Appiah, eds., *Richard Wright: Critical Perspectives Past and Present,* Amistad Press, 1993.

Richard Wright has been credited with changing the mode of African-American writing, and this book offers readers a chance to see how he did it and what his critics thought about him. This book provides a great background study of his works.

Horne, Gerald, *Black Liberation/Red Scare: Ben Davis and the Communist Party,* University of Delaware Press, 1994.

Horne gives an in-depth analysis of the role played by the African-American communists in the struggle for equal rights. The book focuses on the role played by Ben Davis, who lived in Harlem and was twice elected to the New York City Council, and offers a different view of the forces behind the Civil Rights movement.

Walker, Margaret, *Richard Wright: Daemonic Genius: A Portrait of the Man, a Critical Look at His Work,* Amistad Press, 1988.

This is an unauthorized biography; Wright's widow took Walker to court to try to stop publication. Walker and Wright shared a friendship for several years, but it is said to have ended badly.

Watson, Steven, *The Harlem Renaissance: Hub of African-American Culture, 1920-1930,* Pantheon Books, 1995.

The Harlem Renaissance was a literary, creative, and intellectual movement that included the works of such authors as Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, and Jean Toomer and entertainers such as Duke Ellington, Josephine Baker, and Ethel Waters. This book covers that period with photographs and drawings, and Watson's colorful narration describes Harlem during this flowering of creative endeavors.

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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 memberseducational 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.

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

We Welcome Your Suggestions

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

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