Dharma Study Guide

Dharma by Vikram Chandra

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites".

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers".

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Introduction

Vikram Chandra's story "Dharma" is set in Bombay, India, and revolves around Major General Jago Antia, a senior officer in the Indian Army. Jago Antia has built up a legendary career in the military and he is universally admired and respected by the junior officers. But when he resigns from the army because of an incurable "phantom" pain in his leg that had been amputated twenty years earlier, he returns to his empty family home in Bombay. There he discovers that he faces a test quite different from those he is used to encountering in army life: the house is haunted, and Jago Antia must somehow face up to the ghosts of his past.

Chandra uses this premise to tell a modern ghost story while at the same time providing an intriguing twist to the venerable ghost story genre. "Dharma" is a story not only about ghosts. It is also about duty (which is roughly what the title "Dharma," an Indian word, means), acceptance, and the peculiar ways in which past and present interact in the mind of a single individual.

First published in *Paris Review* in 1994 and included as one of five stories in Chandra's collection, *Love and Longing in Bombay* (1997), "Dharma" is an unusual contribution to the growing body of Indian literature written in English that has been published over the last two decades.

Author Biography

Vikram Chandra was born on July 23, 1961, in New Delhi, India, the son of Navin (a company president) and Kamna (a screenwriter, playwright, and author) Chandra. He received most of his secondary education at Mayo College, a boarding school in Ajmer, Rajasthan, where his work was published in the school's literary magazine. After attending St. Xavier's College in Bombay for a short period, Chandra came to the United States as an undergraduate student in the early 1980s. In 1984, he graduated from Pomona College in Claremont, near Los Angeles, with a Bachelor of Arts degree (magna cum laude) in English, with a concentration in creative writing.

Chandra then attended the Film School at Columbia University in New York, dropping out halfway through the program in order to begin work on a novel. He enrolled in a Master of Arts degree program at Johns Hopkins University, where he studied with John Barth. He also founded Letters and Light, a computer programming and consulting firm. His clients included oil companies, nonprofit organizations, and the Houston Zoo.

Chandra graduated from Johns Hopkins University in 1987 and, at the suggestion of Barth, went to study under Donald Barthelme, who was head of the writing program at the University of Houston in Texas. Chandra regards Barthelme as his most important teacher.

Chandra became an adjunct professor at the University of Houston, from 1987 to 1993, and he also received a master of fine arts degree from that university in 1992. He was a visiting writer at George Washington University, Washington, D.C., from 1994 to 1995, and it was during this period that his short story "Dharma" was published in the *Paris Review* and won that journal's Discovery Prize.

Chandra's first novel, *Red Earth and Pouring Rain: A Novel*, which took him six years to write, was published in 1995. It won the David Higham Prize in Fiction from the Book Trust, London, England, in 1995 and the Commonwealth Writers Prize: Best First Book in 1996. Chandra commented that the form of the story was inspired by the stories he had grown up with from the long Indian epics and popular Indian movies.

Two volumes of short stories followed in quick succession: *Tales of Love and Longing* (1996), and *Love and Longing in Bombay: Stories* (1997). *Love and Longing in Bombay* was short-listed for the Guardian Fiction Prize and was included in "Notable Books of 1997" by the *New York Times Book Review*. Chandra was also author of the television series "City of Gold" produced in Bombay in 1996.

Chandra currently divides his time between Bombay and Washington, D.C., where he teaches creative writing at George Washington University.

Plot Summary

"Dharma" begins in a bar in Bombay, India, called the Fisherman's Rest. The young narrator, who works for a software company, describes a thin, white-haired old man named Subramaniam, who is often to be seen at the bar. Subramaniam had been joint secretary of the Ministry of Defence, where he had worked for forty-one years, and was now retired. Ramani introduces the narrator to Subramaniam. Ramani is telling the group about an old house in the city that cannot be sold because people believe it is haunted. The narrator pours scorn on this idea and laments the fact that educated men and women can believe in such things. But then Subramaniam speaks up in a small, whispery voice and says he knew a man once who met a ghost. He then tells the story.

Subramaniam's story begins with fifty-year-old Major General Jago Antia, who is in charge of fighting an insurgency. (Jago is a nickname given to him early in his military career; his real name is Jehangir.) Jago Antia has had a distinguished military career which has made him famous, and he is revered by the men under his command.

The day of his fiftieth birthday, Jago Antia feels an ache in his missing leg, which had been amputated twenty years earlier. The pain does not go away and he is unable to sleep. Reluctantly, he takes medication but the pain only gets worse. Feeling that he can no longer function at the high standard he expects of himself, he resigns his command. He then travels back from Calcutta to his family home in Bombay. It is an old house, now lived in only by the old housekeeper, Amir Khan. Jago Antia's parents are dead and since he has no intention of living in the house for long, he tells Amir Khan that he plans to sell it.

That night as Jago Antia tries to sleep, he hears a voice. At first he thinks it belongs to Amir Khan, but he nonetheless gets out of bed and goes to investigate. He walks to the hallway and then climbs the staircase. He hears the voice again and realizes it is too young to be Amir Khan. Then he senses something moving and hears the swish of feet on the ground. On the floor he sees the shape of shoes, which are making footprints as they approach him. Initially he freezes, but then convinces himself that what he saw was a trick of the light. He continues to ascend the staircase but he feels an icy chill, hears the voice again and then collapses and slides down the stairs. He reaches the bottom and sits there, frightened, until dawn. For three days he paces up and down at the bottom of the stairs. Meanwhile his longtime batman, Thapa, arrives at the house.

Jago Antia inquires about selling the house but his lawyer, Todywalla, says it is impossible because there is "something" there. Thapa suggests bringing in an exorcist who can remove it. Jago Antia tries to convince himself that this is all nonsense, but that night he hears the voice again. He and the terrified Thapa ascend the stairs to investigate. Jago Antia reaches the balcony, and the voice comes from around a corner, saying, with a sob, "Where shall I go?" Jago Antia backs away and falls.

The narrative then flashes back to the time when Jago Antia loses his leg. He parachutes down with his Indian forces to the town of Sylhet where they are opposed by

Pakistani troops. (The war is most likely the one that was fought in 1971, when India supported what was then East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, in its struggle for independence from West Pakistan. Sylhet is located in Bangladesh.) As Jago Antia and his men move into the burning city, he steps on a mine that explodes. His men carry him into a house, and, as he forces himself to sit up, he sees that his right leg is destroyed below the knee. He orders the nursing assistant to cut it off, but the man tells him that there is no instrument available to carry out his command. Jago Antia's radioman, Jung, will not do it either, so Jago Antia asks him for his *kukri* (knife), and cuts off his leg himself. Then he takes command of the battle once more, giving instructions over the radio.

Returning to the story's present, Jago Antia wakes and, for a while, does not know where he is. Then a doctor comes and tells him there are no injuries following his fall. Two days later, the exorcist, a man named Thakker, comes and performs a ceremony. He reports that the strange entity is very strong and immovable—it is a child that is looking for something. He says that he cannot remove it. Only someone who knows it and is from its family can help it. That person must go naked and alone and meet it and ask it what it wants.

That night, Jago Antia ascends the stairs. He knows who it is who waits for him. As he reaches the balcony he peers into his mother's room, and memories of his childhood begin to return. He remembers walking down the stairs with his mother and father to where his family is gathered. His dead brother Sohrab, whom he always called Soli, has been laid out and draped in a white sheet.

Jago Antia moves down the corridor, feeling the presence of the ghost all around him. He reaches the room that used to be both his and Soli's room. He goes in and sits on the bed. More memories of childhood flood in—of how he and Soli had once fought; of how he, Jehangir, had lost; and of how Soli was fearless and a leader. Then he remembers a Sunday afternoon in which they were visited by his favorite uncle, the soldier, Burjor Mama.

Trembling, Jago Antia ascends another flight of stairs, following the ghost. Obeying the injunction to be naked, he removes his plastic leg. Memories of Burjor Mama buying the boys a kite come. They run to the roof with it.

As Jago Antia continues to ascend, he recalls a terrible incident. As the boys quarrel about who is to fly the kite, Soli falls three feet to the lower level of the roof and is killed.

Jago Antia hears the ghostly voice again and asks, "What do you want?" More memories of the accident rush into his mind.

At dawn, Jago Antia again asks the ghost what it wants. He sees a boy, who turns to face him. The boy is wearing a uniform of olive green and asks again, "Where shall I go?" Jago Antia then remembers his seventh birthday party, his first since Soli died. His parents wanted to give him a present, but he did not want anything. Then he said that he wanted a uniform. Jago Antia looks at the boy as he approaches and sees the letters

above the pocket: J. ANTIA. It is himself. Then he sees the boy clearly, and he also sees the whole course of his own life. He tells the boy that he is already at home, implying that he does not need to go anywhere.

Coming up the stairs, Thapa and Amir Khan approach Jago Antia. Jago Antia says that the ghost has gone and when they ask who it was, he says, "Someone I didn't know before." He leans on their shoulders and descends the stairs. He feels free and happy. The story ends with the three men sitting on the porch drinking tea.

Summary

"Dharma" is a ghost story narrated by a young man who works for a software company in Bombay. The narrator's friend, Ramani, takes him to a small bar in Bombay called "The Fisherman's Post", a hidden pub on the second floor of a house. Here, they meet three old men, including the mysterious Subramaniam, a retiree from the ministry of defense. Subramaniam has been coming to The Fisherman's Post for years. Waiters bring him drinks without being asked and, although he usually sits quietly, the others look at him while they are speaking. As the story begins, Ramani tells the men that he had been to Bandra that day and mentions the seafront bungalow that he saw. He explains that the house had been empty for years because buyers believed that it is haunted. The narrator denies the possibility of ghosts, defending his position by estimating that a family property dispute was more likely the cause of the house's abandonment. Subramaniam disagrees with the narrator. He claims that he knew a man once who was visited by a ghost.

The story moves into Subramaniam's tale of Major General Jago Antia, the man who met a ghost. Jago Antia had lost his leg twenty years ago and although his doctor had warned him about phantom pain, Jago had never experienced any feeling in the place where his leg once was, until the day he turned fifty. On his fiftieth birthday, Jago feels a sudden ache under his plastic knee. The pain surprises him so much that he stumbles. The officers who surrounded him when he stumbles turn away in sympathy because Jago never stumbles. The young lieutenants become emotional because they looked up to Jago. They admire his strength and discipline. He is famous for both his stare and his anger. Jago's stumble and quick recovery give them even more faith that he is invincible. Although he had received a gold metal and several combat metals, his leg is the center of his legend. Of course, not many people know the details of his injury. His co-workers respect the way that he continues his job as though his leg is not missing. Many are astonished at the way that his rough exterior contrasts with his polite but fastidious nature. Young officers try to imitate Jago in this way. They wish that they had his certainty, and view his loneliness as a sign of his genius.

On the day that Jago turns fifty, his men throw a party in his honor, under the guise of celebrating a battle from fifty years ago, since Jago would not have accepted a party given in his behalf. After Jago leaves the party, the men share stories about him. Jago struggles to fall asleep that night, disrupted by the phantom pain from his missing leg. Each night, while lying in bed, Jago imagines himself falling, until this image turns into a dream of falling. On this night, however, Jago is still awake at four in the morning, when he rises from bed to study his maps, looking for routes and staging areas of combat. Early the next morning, Jago's friend, Thapa, finds him walking in the garden and asks him what he is doing there. Jago explains that he couldn't sleep. Jago imagines that he sees men in the distance, and imagines them to be woodcutters and men he once fought.

The next night, Jago discovers that the phantom pain has still not gone away. He tries to make himself insensitive to the pain but his years of self-discipline cannot help him with

this. Some time passes, and eventually Jago asks the Medical Corps for medication but even this doesn't stop the pain his is experiencing at night. Jago finds that he is unable to concentrate and his work begins to suffer. He is embarrassed that the men he works with are sympathetic instead of disappointed. Jago has become what he despises, a careless man. He worries that soon he will make a mistake that will get one of his men killed.

Feeling he has no other choice, Jago asks to be discharged from the military for medical reasons. He travels from his post in Calcutta back home to his parents' house in Bombay. During the train ride home, Jago remembers an afternoon at school in the fifth grade when he ran outside to watch two fighter planes that were flying low over the city. He also recalls his first two weeks at the academy. His roommate found Jago doing push-ups at five a.m. on a Sunday morning and told him he was an enthusiast. The roommate gave him the nickname Jago, and he was called that from that day on; even the major general at the academy called him Jago when he was given a metal for best cadet. Only his parents used his real name, Jehangir Antia.

When Jago reaches his parent's house, an old man who served as housekeeper, called Amir Khan, waves from the porch. The house is described as having three stories, painted mostly dark brown with delicate arches on the balconies. Trees and bushes surround the house. Jago can smell the scent of gun oil from an old hunting rifle. He walks inside to find that the house is exactly as it was when he left years before. Rooms are filled with flower print Victorian couches and gold-rimmed painting of his grandparents and uncles. Jago thinks of his parents, who are long gone now. He gathers his belongings and heads upstairs but Amir stops him. He tells Jago that the upstairs has been closed up for years and that his parents sleep in the ground floor study. Jago tells the housekeeper that he is only at home for a few days to sell the house. Amir says that he is glad that Jago is selling it.

That night, as Jago tries to sleep, his leg aches again. As he lies in bed, he hears a distant whisper but cannot make out what the voice is saying. At first, he believes that the voice is Amir talking to himself, but when he hears it again, he realizes that it is a young voice. He straps on his artificial leg to go see what is happening. As he walks into the hall, he discovers that the voice is coming from above him. He tries to make his way up the stairs in the darkness, feeling his way around. On the first landing, he senses movement. He walks around the corner and hears the swish of feet on the ground. Lightning hits the lawn outside, casting light on the staircase. Jago sees the footprints on the tiles beneath him. As he watches, more footprints appear, coming towards him. He looks around and, deciding that it must have been a trick of the light, moves forward. Standing on the landing, cold air moves around his ankles, causing him to shiver. Jago hears the voice again and goes back downstairs. He tries to make his way up the stairs numerous times that night, but is too frightened to ever complete the task. In the morning, he sits on the first step, weakened and exhausted.

Jago remains in a slump for three days until his friend, Thapa, comes to visit him. Thapa's shock at Jago strange behavior brings Jago back into reality. Jago visits a friend called Todywalla, to speak with him about selling his parent's house. Todywalla

tells Jago that it will be impossible to sell the house because it is haunted. Jago denies this, never letting on that he has heard the ghost in the house. Jago tells Thapa this news and Thapa says he will bring someone to get rid of the ghost. He cautions Jago that they should not sleep there in the meantime, but Jago insists that they will stay there. As night falls, Jago hears the ghost once more. He urges Thapa to come upstairs with him to investigate. The two men move slowly up the stairs. Since Thapa is with him, Jago goes further upstairs than he had gone on his own, and makes his way to the balcony. He gets so close to the ghost that he can now hear what it is saying. The ghost says, "Where shall I go?"

Jago falls from the balcony. A dreamlike flashback brings his thoughts back to the day when he lost his leg after going to a three-story house to gain a better vantage point during combat. He has no recollection of being injured, but woke to find men around him trying to help. He felt pain deep inside his ears and discovered that he set off a mine buried in the road. He views his torn leg that has black blood streaming from it. Jago tells the nurse that is attending to him to cut off his leg. She declines, saying that she does not have the right supplies to do this. Jago cuts the leg off himself.

The morning after Jago falls off the balcony of his parents' house, he wakes not knowing where he is. He feels the phantom pain in his leg again. He remains in a state of confusion all day. A doctor comes to see him and suggests that he stay in bed to rest, even thought he has no injuries from the fall. Two nights later, after he has recovered, Thapa brings an exorcist to the house. Much to Jago's surprise, the exorcist is a manager from an electronics company. Thakker, the exorcist, changes out of his work clothes before beginning the ritual of releasing the ghost. Thakker tells Jago that the ghost is very strong. It is a child who is looking for something. He says that he cannot remove the ghost because no one can remove a child. He comments that the only person who can solve this is a member of the family. They must approach the ghost naked and alone and ask what the ghost is seeking. Jago agrees to try this suggestion.

That night, Jago undresses as he ascends the staircase. He arrives at the balcony and peers through the glass door. He has a vision of himself as a young child, in the house with his parents. In his vision, the three go downstairs to find the house is crowded with people and Jago's young deceased brother laid out on the couch. Clearly, the memory is of his brother's funeral. As Jago walks down the corridor of the house toward his father's study, he feels the ghost walking beside him.

Jago escapes back into his memory of his older brother, Soli. He recalls the summer that his brother died. Their favorite uncle, Burjor Mama, had come to visit them on a Sunday afternoon. Burjor, who is Jago's mother's younger brother, is a solider and is due to report for work on Monday morning. Jago sees Burjor's olive green uniform lying on his bed. Burjor walks out from the bathroom after showering, wearing a towel, and Jago notices a star shaped scar on his uncle's arm. Before Burjor leaves, he gives his nephews a kite.

As soon as Burjor departs, the boys run up to the roof to play with the kite. The kite line cuts Soli's fingers. The next day the boys are on the roof with the kite again. Jago wants

to try flying the kite on his own but Soli refuses, saying that it will cut him. Jago moves towards him and Soli walks backwards away from him. Soli falls off the roof causing his death. The present day Jago questions the relation of this day to the ghost and wonders how the short, three-foot drop had killed his brother. Jago hears the ghost again, repeating, "Where shall I go?" Jago asks the ghost what it wants. He sees the ghost turn toward him and recognizes that it is wearing an olive green uniform, like the one that Burjor wore. Jago thinks back to his seventh birthday, his first party without Soli. He had refused a gift from his parents but after they continually urged him to ask for something, he tells his father that he wants a uniform. In the present the ghost moves forward and Jago reads the stitching above its pocket that says "J. Antia." As the sun comes up Jago sees the ghost clearly; it is himself as a child. He sees his strength, his silence, his courage and devotion, as well as his pain throughout his life. Jago answers the ghost's question by telling him that he is already home.

As the story winds down, Jago tells Thapa and Amir to come upstairs. He tells them he saw the ghost and it was someone that he didn't know before and that the child was lost. Thapa and Amir help Jago down the stairs. Jago thinks that it is too late to erase his history. His solitude is part of who he is now. Nevertheless, Jago feels free.

Analysis

"Dharma" is the opening story in Vikram Chandra's Collection *Love and Longing in Bombay*. The narrator recounts the tales he hears in a small bar in Bombay. In "Dharma", the narrator is introduced to Subramaniam, an old man who claims that he knew someone who met his own ghost. He tells the narrator the story of Jago Antia. In preface to his story, Subramaniam says, "Some people meet their ghost, and some don't. But we're all haunted by them." The opening statement foreshadows the mystery to be revealed. Notably, the quote is "Some people meet *their* ghost". This is suitable to the fact that the ghost met by Jago is himself as a young boy.

There are several instances of symbolism used in the story. The allusions to war imagery help build Jago's character. Even from childhood, Jago was drawn to the army; throughout his life it has been a calling. The careful planning, discipline and cold follow-through required by a good solider have framed his identity. One of the most interesting examples of violent symbolism used in "Dharma" is introduced when Jago returns to his childhood home after years away. One of the first things that he notices is the scent of gun oil from an old hunting rifle. This is a symbol of how Jago's sense memories are filled with violence. Symbolic references to battle are once again present when Jago first discover the ghost in his parent's house. The narrator describes that on the staircase, Jago looks for, "dead ground and lines of fire," which is again symbolic to the war imagery deeply ingrained in this character. Jago notes to himself that wherever the ghost footprints are coming from, he is prepared for battle.

Jago's first encounter with the ghost is filled with dark imagery that creates a haunting atmosphere for readers. When he first ascends the staircase, the narrator describes everything as being in the darkness or shadows. Jago observes his surroundings as

"blackness and deeper blackness." Symbolically, this imagery describes Jago's journey into the depth of his memory. It alludes to his mental and physical pain. At the same time, encountering the ghost is revealing. Jago is described as a fearless solider, yet he is afraid of the ghost intruder. Perhaps this suggests that Jago truly fears himself. Until the forced confrontation with the ghost, Jago represses his past.

A similar use of symbolism is present during the flashback to the day that Jago lost his leg. On the surface, the black blood that comes from his wound is indicates the depth of the injury. More than this, the dark blood from deep inside Jago once again ties the image of his physical pain to the idea of his metal anguish. After Jago cuts off his own leg, he refuses the morphine, an indication of his extraordinary strength but also a symbol of his stubbornness and need to prove his strength. Jago is hard on himself. He ignores loss instead of mourning for it. Jago lets go of his childhood with the same urgency that he cuts off his leg.

Jago's uncle Burjor Mama is an important character even though the author deals with this character only briefly. The description of the uncle's olive green uniform lets readers know what they are seeing when the ghost is wearing the same uniform. In addition, Jago is fascinated by his uncle's scar. The scar is symbolic, it is star shaped. Stars are often used to represent destiny, as in "it is written in the stars." With this symbol, a connection is formed between Jago's past and present. In childhood, Jago sees his uncle's uniform and star-shaped scar from battle, later on Jago's identity becomes wholly integrated into his life as a solider.

During flashbacks in the second half of the story, the narrator calls Jago by his childhood name, Jehangir. This method allows for easy movement from past to present and indicates that Jehangir and Jago are separate beings. This becomes a type of foreshadowing, letting the reader know that Jago's own ghost is the intruder. The dual use of names is necessary for the reader to understand what is happening. It suggests that a part of Jago has become physically separated from him.

In Jago's last statements in the story, he tells Amir and Thapa that the ghost was someone he didn't know before. This represents the way that Jago closed the door on his childhood self. As the tale concludes, Jago realizes that it is too late to change his path but in spite of this, he feels free. The reason for this feeling of liberation is that when he helps his ghost, he releases his pain. In connection to his symbolic dreams of falling, what Jago needs most is to let go and, by facing his past self, he finally is able to do this.

Characters

Major General Jago Antia

Major General Jago Antia, whose given name was Jehangir, is the principal character in the story. He is a man of iron self-discipline and strong will power, but he is also lonely. Following the death of his brother, Soli, he decides, when still a young boy, that he wants to go into the military. He excels at military academy, winning a gold medal for best cadet and goes on to an extremely successful career in the army. He wins many medals and becomes famous for his tactical skills. But when he is about thirty, he leads an attack by the Indian Army on the town of Sylhet, which is held by Pakistani forces, and his leg is shattered by a mine. He amputates the leg below the knee himself. His handicap does not impair his military career, however, and the loss of his leg becomes part of the legend that surrounds him. Even at the age of fifty, he is able to shame men twenty years younger than he by his ability to traverse jungle terrain.

When Jago Antia is troubled by a persistent pain in his missing leg, he realizes that it is impairing his efficiency at his job. Fearing that he will soon make a mistake that will get some of his young soldiers killed, he resigns from his command.

After his resignation and his return to his family home in Bombay, Jago Antia faces what might be seen as his toughest test. He must come to terms with his boyhood self, which returns in the form of a ghost, and with the course his adult life took. As with all the other challenges Jago Antia has faced in his life, he rises to the task, and after encountering the ghost of his youthful self, he finds the peace that had formerly eluded him.

Jung

Jung is the nineteen-year-old radioman in the Indian Para Brigade under Jago Antia's command. When Jago Antia is wounded at the battle for the city of Sylhet, Jung cannot bring himself to obey Jago Antia's command to amputate his commander's leg, but he hands over his knife so that Jago Antia can do the job himself.

Amir Khan

Amir Khan is the old housekeeper at Jago Antia's family home. He has a thin neck, with a white beard "that gave him the appearance of a heron."

Burjor Mama

Burjor Mama is Jago Antia's uncle, his mother's younger brother. Jago Antia remembers him from his boyhood. Burjor Mama is a soldier and the favorite uncle of Jehangir and Soli. He is a man of unceasing energy who takes the boys out on many trips. He also

buys them a kite, and it is while playing with the kite that Soli meets with his fatal accident.

The Narrator

The narrator is the unnamed man at the beginning of the story who describes his meeting with Subramaniam at the Fisherman's Rest. The narrator works for a software company and prides himself on being very modern in his outlook. When he hears the ghost story that Subramaniam tells, it contradicts his entire way of seeing the world.

Sohrab

See Soli

Soli

Soli is Jago Antia's older brother. He is a born leader, a boy who would always win in fights against the neighborhood boys. He is also a promising young cricketer. He dies while still a young boy after falling from a roof while flying a kite.

Subramaniam

Subramaniam is a thin, old man with white hair who spends much of his time in a bar called the Fisherman's Rest. He is retired from the Ministry of Defence, where he worked for over forty years. He speaks in a small, whispery voice, and it is he who tells the story of Jago Antia and the ghost.

Thakker

Thakker is a middle-aged sales manager from a large electronics company. He also serves as an exorcist and performs a religious ceremony aimed at removing the ghost from Jago Antia's house. He informs Jago Antia that the ghost is that of a child and cannot be moved, except by a member of its own family.

Thapa

Thapa is a small, round man who is Jago Antia's batman, or servant. The two men have known each other for thirty years and their relationship is a close one. It is Thapa who arranges for the exorcist to come to the house and try to remove the ghost.

Todywalla

Todywalla is the attorney consulted by Jago Antia about the sale of the haunted house. Todywalla says that the house cannot be sold because there is "something" in it and no one will buy it.

Themes

The title of the story is a Sanskrit word that means literally "right action." It is commonly translated into English as "duty" and also "righteousness," but both these are narrower concepts than implied by the Sanskrit term. According to Indian philosopher Radhakrishnan, in *The Hindu View of Life*, the word *dharma* comes from the root *dhr*, to hold. *Dharma* means "that which holds a thing and maintains it in being."

Every form of life, every person and every group, has its *dharma*. In practical terms, *dharma* refers to a mode of activity that maintains life on the path of spiritual evolution and righteousness. For example, if a man has great musical talent and becomes a violinist, he is pursuing his *dharma*—the mode of activity that best suits his specific abilities. If he were to ignore his real calling and pursue some other profession or occupation, he would not be following his *dharma.*

However, not every person understands clearly his or her *dharma*, the activity that fulfills the criterion of "right action" in their specific situation in life. And even when a person is living in accordance with his *dharma*, he may still have some regrets or misgivings about other paths in life not taken. In this lies the key to understanding the subtleties of the story "Dharma." It is a story about the mysterious ways through which a person becomes who he is and chooses his life purpose. It is also about acceptance of one's duty and one's destiny, whatever that may be. The theme becomes apparent in the climactic moment when Jago Antia finally comes face to face with the ghost of his childhood self. After this encounter, he acquires knowledge and acceptance.

What Jago Antia sees in the child that is, or was, himself are the seeds of all the qualities that he later expressed in his life: "his vicious and ravenous strength, his courage and his devotion, his silence and his pain, his whole misshapen and magnificent life." This life began to take the shape that it did when Jago Antia was a seven-year-old boy, and was still called by his given name, Jehangir. The crucial moment is his seventh birthday party, his first since the death of his brother, Soli. When pressed by his parents to say what gift he wishes for, Jehangir can at first think of nothing to say. Then he suddenly asks for a uniform. Obviously he is remembering the uniform that his favorite uncle, Burjor Mama, wore. The young Jehangir had lain on the bed beside the uniform and absorbed its peculiar smell. The name B. MEHTA (his uncle's name) was sewn into his uniform above the breast pocket, just as J. ANTIA appears on the pocket of the uniform that the child-ghost is wearing.

From that point on, Jehangir's future was determined—he wore a uniform with all it implies— even though at the time he could hardly have realized the implications of his request. Sure enough, as soon as he was old enough, he joined the Indian military. Why did he ask for a uniform? Perhaps as a child he absorbed from his uncle a dim sense of *dharma*, that it was his duty to follow the uncle he loved into uniform. In this sense, he was following a family *dharma*. It is this realization that gives Jago Antia the sense of peace and acceptance with which the story ends: in spite of all the difficulties he

experienced in life, he knows that he was following his duty or *dharma* throughout his long and successful military career, and in that he can be happy.

But this explanation does not do full justice to the subtlety of the theme, since there is an ambiguous quality to Jago Antia's final realizations about "his whole misshapen and magnificent life." The words "misshapen" and "magnificent" do not sit well together, and the keyword here may well be "misshapen." It suggests that something about this "magnificent" life was not quite right, and it is certainly an odd word to use if Jago Antia's final realization was solely that his life had been lived in accordance with his *dharma*. If that was so, how could it be described as misshapen?

Of course, the word "misshapen" might apply to any human life, since it is rare for anyone to live a life that entirely conforms in every respect to the person's desires and goals. But the use of the word may imply more than this, that Jago Antia's life was misshapen in some more fundamental regard, magnificent though it might have been in many respects. The image conjured up by "misshapen" is in stark contrast to the way, as a child, Jehangir stands up straight as he looks at his parents and asks for a uniform. Something, somewhere, went wrong with his life.

Certainly, Jago Antia is not a man who exhibits much joy in life. He is highly self-disciplined and deeply respected by his men, but perhaps this came at the cost of his personal enjoyment of things. He is a lonely figure, an austere individual exhibiting a high degree of control over his emotions and his responses to events in his life. His comment at the end of the story, after he has recognized the ghost as his child-self, suggests that he now realizes that the life he has lived, and is still living, is somehow offcourse, but it cannot be changed now. "He knew he was still and forever Jago Antia, that for him it was too late for anything but a kind of solitude."

Perhaps Jago Antia became the sort of man he did—of stern character, unyielding in the demands he made of himself—because of feelings of guilt over the death of his brother Soli. Or perhaps it was from a desire to please his parents by excelling at whatever he did, just as Soli had done. Whatever was the cause, the implication is that since every choice made in life closes off other possibilities, when seven-year-old Jehangir chose a uniform, he cut himself off from an aspect of his own nature— that part of himself that might have done many things other than serve in the military. He might have expressed many different qualities than those that found an outlet in the life he did in fact live. To use the jargon of popular psychology, Jago Antia leaves his "inner child" behind. This lost ghost-child has remained quite unknown to Jago Antia, a fact that is conveyed by the difference in their names: the boy is called Jehangir, but the adult is known only by the nickname Jago, which was bestowed on him in the military academy.

When Jago Antia finally encounters his childhood self, he realizes the paradoxical nature of his life, at once "misshapen" and "magnificent," and he accepts it. Knowledge and acceptance exorcise the ghost and change the man, which is why the final scene is a contented one. Jago Antia is shown enjoying fellowship with those who are technically his social inferiors; he is able to laugh and to enjoy the simple pleasure of drinking a cup of tea—a scene that one suspects has not happened very often in his life.

Style

Language

Modern Indian authors writing in English often use words from Indian languages in their work. This accurately reflects the way people in India express themselves when they are speaking English. For example, in "Dharma," words that are not found in any English dictionary are used frequently, usually italicized but with no explanation of what they mean. The reader is left to deduce the meaning from the context. These terms include *kutri*, a knife used by warriors; *sahayak*, a batman, which is a servant to an officer in the British army—the term appears to have been adopted for officers in the Indian army too; *dal*, a dish made of lentils; *dhoti*, a loincloth worn by Hindus; and *thali*, a dish. The words *sadra, manjha*, and *diya* are also used.

Run-on Sentences

At times, when the story describes moments of great excitement or stress, the author alters the grammatical syntax (sentence structure) to incorporate run-on sentences, combining multiple independent clauses into a single sentence, joined only by commas, not semicolons, as correct grammar would dictate.

For example, this is the incident in which Jaga Antia steps on a mine:

He started off confidently across the street, and then all the sound in the world vanished, leaving a smooth silence, he had no recollection of being thrown, but now he was falling through the air, down, he felt distinctly the impact of the ground, but again there was nothing, no sound.

This technique is used again frequently when Jago Antia encounters the ghost:

And then he was at the bottom of a flight of stairs, he knew he had to go up, because it had gone before him, and now he stumbled because the pain came, and it was full of fear, he went up, one two three, and then leaned over, choking.

Using run-on sentences in this way is appropriate for the situation as it expresses the idea of thoughts rushing quickly through a frightened mind. It is also appropriate that the thoughts belong to Jago Antia, who is normally such a controlled, selfdisciplined individual. It shows that he is being taken out of his normal orderly forms of thinking and acting.

Frame-Story and Flashback

The structure of the story employs two techniques: the frame-story and the flashback.

A frame-story is a narrative within which a character tells a story. Thus in "Dharma," the main story, that of Jago Antia, is introduced by another narrative in which the narrator tells of his first meeting with Subramaniam. The narrator complains about the backwardness of people in Bombay who believe in superstitions like ghosts. This remark creates the link to the main story.

The story told by Subramaniam jumps back and forth in time. It begins when Jago Antia is fifty years old, and then flashes back to twenty years earlier when he amputated his own leg. Then the narrative returns to the present, but when Jago Antia encounters the ghost, his mind flashes back to several incidents in his childhood, and, at times, past and present become almost indistinguishable before the narrative returns to the present at the end of the story.

Foreshadowing

Using the technique of foreshadowing, an author can hint at events or themes that only become fully developed or known later in the narrative. The technique can prepare the reader for what happens later.

There are several examples of foreshadowing in "Dharma," a story that revolves around a memory of the past. When Jago Antia resigns his command and travels home to Bombay, he remembers his fifth grade classroom and other things from his childhood. He resents the memory because it seems useless to him. (There is also an irony here because he will later find that understanding childhood memories is vital to his wellbeing.) As he alights from the train he feels covered in an "oily film of recollection." Then a remark by Thapa has him thinking back to when he was a boy: "For a moment Jago Antia felt time slipping around him like a dark wave, but then he shook away the feeling and stood up." This expresses the fact that Jago Antia is being pulled back into the uncomfortable memories of the past quite well, but the significance of this will not be known until later.

Foreshadowing also occurs during the flashback, as Jago Antia commands his troops in the assault on Sylhet. He looks at a decades-old radio, to which he is listening to a news broadcast, and something about it makes him uneasy:

[A] shiver came from low on his back into his heart, a whisper of something so tiny that he could not name it, and yet it broke his concentration and took him away from his body and this room with its drapes of cloth to somewhere else, a flickering vision of a room, curtains blowing in a gusting wind, a feeling of confusion.

The reader learns later that this is a suppressed memory of his childhood, when his brother Soli possesses a radio that Jehangir was not allowed to touch but which fascinated him. The foreshadowing shows how much memories from the past affected Jago Antia twenty years earlier, and lays the foundation for the later scene in which he is forced to confront these memories directly.

Symbolism

Jago Antia's amputated leg and its plastic replacement serve as a visible symbol of the fact that, at the psychic level, he is severed from a part of himself (his wandering child-self). Something real has been lost, and something false has attached itself to him.

The phantom ache that he feels in the amputated leg symbolizes the fact that this psychic wound is still present. The sudden and persistent presence of the ache also suggests that the time for healing is at hand. When Jago Antia encounters the ghost, his instruction is to do so naked, meaning that he must not present any false appearances, but only his true self. He also realizes that this includes removing the false leg, a moment which is strongly emphasized in the narrative as Jago Antia says, "'All right you bastard, naked, naked,' and he tore at the straps, and then the leg rolled down the stairs to the bottom." At the end of the story he is able to strap the leg on once more, and it is fair to assume that he will no longer feel the ache.

Historical Context

Love and Longing in Bombay (1997), the collection of stories in which "Dharma" appeared, was published at a time when literature written by Indians in English was enjoying unprecedented growth and critical acclaim. This development began in the 1980s with the publication of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981). The success of this novel convinced publishers in the West that there was a commercial market for Indian fiction.

Since then, many other Indian authors, writing in English, have made their mark outside their native land. In addition to Rushdie, these include Rohinton Mistry (*Such a Long Journey* and *A Fine Balance*); Arundhati Roy (*The God of Small Things*, which won Britain's prestigious Booker Prize), Anita Desai (*Clear Light of Day* and *In Custody*), Amit Chaudhuri (*Freedom Song*), Vikram Seth (*A Suitable Boy*), and Amitav Ghosh (*Shadow Lines*).

Although these writers are all from the Indian urban middle-and upper-middle classes, they do not form a single literary movement or school. However, what they do have in common is that their work is set in India, they use the English language in a distinctively Indian way, and many of them employ the techniques of "magical realism" (the inclusion of supernatural or fantastic elements in the narrative). Many of them live outside India (Chandra, for example, divides his time between Washington, D.C. and Bombay). One reason for this is that it is easier for them to make a living as a writer in the United States than it is in India. In recent years, British and American publishers have sought out emerging Indian writers and offered them large advances for their work.

This explosion of English-language creativity on the part of Indian writers, which shows no sign of diminishing, could not have been predicted a generation ago. Although in the 1930s and 1940s, Indian writers such as Mulk Raj Anand and R. K. Narayan produced notable works written in English, the future of English-language Indian fiction did not look promising. In the 1960s, thirteen years after India achieved its independence from Britain, the national government had decided to establish Hindi as the official language. But English continued to grow as a world language, and as Indian and Pakistani writers living in the West continued to write in English, so did others still in India.

Since Rushdie's groundbreaking *Midnight's Children*, English-language Indian fiction has, in the opinion of some experts, produced a body of work superior in quality to anything written in any of the eighteen other languages of India (these are known as India's "vernacular" languages, and include Urdu, Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati, and Marathi). Rushdie himself, writing in *The New Yorker* in 1997, said, "The true Indian literature of the first postcolonial half century has been made in the language the British left behind."

Not all Indians would accept this, however, and there is, according to Rushdie (and Chandra as well), a belief amongst some Indian critics and scholars that Indians who write in English and have won prominence in Western literary circles are too cosmopolitan, too concerned with writing for the West, to be authentically Indian.

Chandra reports in "The Cult of Authenticity: India's Cultural Commissars Worship 'Indianness' Instead of Art," that he was once accused by an Indian academic of choosing the titles of his stories such as "Dharma," "Shakti," and "Shanti" from Sanskrit words for the sole reason of signaling to Western readers, for commercial reasons, that the work had Indian content, since no Indian writing in an Indian language would use these terms (a statement that Chandra vigorously challenged and refuted by finding many such words in the titles of Indian literature written in Hindi and Bengali, and in films made by Indians).

In reply to Indian critics who believe there is something intrinsically un-Indian about writing in English, Rushdie pointed out in his *New Yorker* article that English has been spoken long enough in India to have become the equivalent of an indigenous language, not merely the language of the colonial power. He also pointed out that Urdu, which is considered a language indigenous to India, was originally brought to India by Muslim conquerors.

This issue of whether a formerly colonized people should use the language of the colonizer (thereby reaching a wider international audience but excluding many groups in the former colony) is part of a wider debate that surrounds what scholars call postcolonial literature. This term refers to literature written mostly by African and Asian authors in the period following their nations' independence from the colonizing European powers. Chandra's novel *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* (1995) is considered a good example of postcolonial literature, since it ranges over both Indian and Western culture, revealing the interaction between them.

There is also a hint in "Dharma" of what postcolonial studies describe as "neocolonialism": the process by which formerly colonized countries engage in Western-driven modernization and economic globalization. The hint is in the first two pages, in which two very different Bombays are presented. One is the corporate world of a modernizing city, with its air-conditioned, streamlined office buildings in which computer technology firms flourish; the other is an older, premodern Bombay in which folk beliefs and superstitions hold up the transaction of business in areas of prime real estate.

Critical Overview

First published in the literary magazine *Paris Review* in 1994, "Dharma" was reprinted as one of the five stories in Chandra's collection, *Love and Longing in Bombay*. The collection as a whole was received with enthusiasm. "A brilliant work," declared *Kirkus Reviews*, and the reviewer also commented that "Each [story] recounts a quest of some kind, and all are distinguished by unusually detailed and persuasive characterizations."

Shashi Tharoor, in the *New York Times*, declared that *Love and Longing in Bombay* "stands out as a considerable accomplishment, one in which the author marries his storytelling prowess to a profound understanding of India's ageless and everchanging society."

Publishers Weekly offered the following general assessment, which certainly can be applied to "Dharma": "Impeccably controlled, intelligent, sensuous and sometimes grim, Chandra's timeless and timely book is remarkably life-affirming, considering the dark areas of the heart he explores."

The verdict of Aamer Hussein, in London's *Times Literary Supplement*, was that the stories exhibit "a lazy charm which defies the constraints of the traditional, well-made story, meandering and flowing through the rhythms of city life to their destination." Hussein also noted that there are parallels with other Indian writers, including Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, and Shobha Dé, in Chandra's choice of Bombay as a setting. In his depiction of Bombay, Chandra is clearly an "insider."

Francis King, writing in *The Spectator*, described Chandra as "that rare thing, a writer who is simultaneously a master story-teller and a master stylist." King did have reservations, however, about the device of dual narrators, which Chandra used in all five stories: "This device . . . seems clumsy in comparison with the adroitness of each story itself."

Criticism

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

Critical Essay #1

Aubrey holds a Ph.D. in English and has published many articles on twentieth-century literature. In this essay, Aubrey shows that while "Dharma" has many elements that are traditional ghost story fare, it also contains innovations that make it an unusual and original contribution to the genre.

In a 1998 interview with Kevin Mahoney for the online literary magazine *Genre*, Chandra said that the origin of his book *Love and Longing in Bombay* lay in his love of ghost stories, especially listening to ghost stories told about empty houses in Bombay: "I thought I'd try and do a ghost story, to feel out the contours of that very ancient and venerable form, and to push at its edges, and interrogate it." The result was "Dharma."

In choosing to write a ghost story, Chandra was, as he points out, using a genre that has ancient roots. Ghost stories are found as far back as the literature of classical Rome, for example, and the genre flourished from about 1850 to 1914 in Victorian and Edwardian England. One reason for the popularity of the ghost story during that period may be that it represented a backlash against the prevailing scientific and materialistic worldview. The ghost story reminded readers that there were still things beyond man's ken, strange happenings that could not be explained by science or rationalism. The popularity of the genre formed one aspect of the tension between science and religion (or supernaturalism) that characterized the Victorian age.

"Dharma" echoes this tension in a more modern setting. The story begins by setting up an opposition between scientific progress in a high-tech world and the persistence of traditional superstitions. The narrator offers a rational explanation for why a particular old house in Bombay is empty (he says it must be because of a dispute between relatives) before Subramaniam counters him by telling of another house that was empty because it was haunted. The opposition of worldviews is also present in the main story, since Jago Antia is a rationalist who does not believe in supernatural phenomena.

As he develops his ghost story, Chandra intermingles many of the traditional elements found in the classics of the genre with more novel approaches. The old house that is haunted could hardly be more traditional; it is a cliché of the form. But when Subramaniam says, as he is about to tell the story, "Some people meet their ghosts, and some don't. But we're all haunted by them," there is a hint that this particular story may have a psychological rather than merely supernatural significance.

One of the masters of the twentieth-century ghost story, M. R. James, described the model structure of a successful ghost story (quoted in Jack Sullivan's *Elegant Nightmares: The English Ghost Story From Le Fanu To Blackwood*):

Let us then, be introduced to the actors in a placid way; let us see them going about their ordinary business, undisturbed by forebodings, pleased with their surroundings; and into this calm environment let the ominous thing put out its head, unobtrusively at first, and then more insistently, until it holds the stage.

The structure of "Dharma" follows, more or less, this model, although Jago Antia's going about his "ordinary business" and the first occurrences of the "ominous thing" are presented simultaneously rather than sequentially. At the beginning, Jago Antia is a respected army officer on active duty at the height of his career. The military world is the one he has known all his adult life, and he is entirely comfortable in it.

But into that ordered world there enters something strange—the phantom pain in his missing leg. This is the first sign of the "ominous thing." Something unusual is beginning to happen, something that has no rational explanation (since before this the leg had been gone for twenty years with not even a twinge) and no apparent cure. Like a ghost, the phantom pain accompanies Jago Antia wherever he goes; although he tries to ignore it, it forces him to pay attention to it. The phantom pain is a harbinger of the crisis that is beginning to well up from the depths of Jago Antia's unconscious mind.

Then follow three visitations of the ghost, each one, as James suggests, more "insistent" than the previous one. Chandra is not averse to including elements that were a staple of the classic Victorian ghost story but might today be considered hackneyed or overused. For example, the first ghostly visitation in "Dharma" is at night, during a thunderstorm. The rain pounds against the windows, there are flashes of lightning, and it is windy. "Atmosphere is the all-important thing," wrote H. P. Lovecraft in his essay "Supernatural Horror in Literature" (quoted in Sullivan) and Chandra is clearly trying to create a vaguely Gothic atmosphere in order to help the reader suspend disbelief and prepare for what follows.

Victorian ghosts were apprehended largely by sight. Chandra's ghost, however, makes its first appearance through the sense of hearing, in the form of a voice in the distance. On its first appearance, the ghost is not seen physically. Jago Antia senses a rush of motion, hears the swishing of feet on the ground—not definite enough to be called footsteps— and then sees the shape of shoes illumined by a flash of lightning. Then he sees footprints coming toward him. As Sullivan points out, "Supernatural horror is usually more convincing when suggested or evoked than when explicitly documented." The subtlety of Chandra's description is in sharp contrast to the more explicit kind of ghostly appearance, as shown in this quotation from Edgar Wallace's story, "The Ghost of Down Hill," (1929) in which the apparition is dressed in a monk's habit:

It stood there motionless, its hands concealed in its wide sleeves, its head bent as in thought. Then slowly the head turned and the moonlight fell upon the bony face, the hollow sockets of its eyes, the white gleam of its fleshless teeth.

There is none of this horrifying appearance in Chandra's ghost; he is suggested rather than seen. There is, however, an element in Jago Antia's experience that is typical of many ghost stories: the atmosphere becomes extremely cold. Ghosts are simply not the warmest of things to have around. So Jago Antia feels a breath of cold air wrapping itself around his ankles and he begins to shiver: "It was a freezing chill that spread up his thighs and into his groin, and it caught him so suddenly that he let his teeth chatter for a moment." It becomes so cold that Jago Antia's fingers ache.

Both during and after the apparitions, Chandra continues to encourage the reader to suspend disbelief by making Jago Antia question what he has heard and seen and seek rational explanations for it. This enables the reader to more easily identify with Jago Antia's experience, since the character is reacting the way any normal person might in such a situation. Jago Antia, for example, at first thinks that the voice he hears may just be a trick of the wind. Then, after the first apparition, he tries to convince himself that it was just a trick of the light on the rain water. When he comes out of his threeday stupor, he attributes it to exhaustion and convinces himself that there is nothing unusual in the house. He even denies to the lawyer Todywalla that he heard anything ghostly.

The initial attempt by the person who sees the ghost to explain it away is a common strategy in ghost stories. As Sullivan notes, it is used in every one of the tales by Sheridan Le Fanu, one of the masters of the Victorian ghost story.

Another element that "Dharma" shares with many ghost stories is the basic reason for the ghost's return: it wants or needs something from the world of the living. The protagonist must find out what that is and supply him with it, so the ghost can finally rest in peace. In "Dharma," for example, the ghost says, "Where shall I go?"; he needs to find a home.

But although Chandra has included many elements that are part of the traditions of the ghost story, he also introduces several innovations that make "Dharma" an unusual and original contribution to the genre.

Perhaps the main innovation that Chandra makes as he "pushes at the edges" of the genre is that the ghost itself turns out not to be a dead person at all (or at least, dead only in the metaphoric sense). It might be better described as a projected memory on the part of Jago Antia, since what he is in fact perceiving is his lost childhood self. Before this becomes apparent, however, Chandra makes every effort to convince the reader that the apparition is indeed a real ghost. He accomplishes this with a trick borrowed not from the ghost story genre but from the mystery or detective novel: he throws up a red herring to lead the reader astray. Just as in a detective novel, where the author will often provide fake clues to fool the reader into thinking that the guilty person is someone other than the real culprit, so during the third appearance of the ghost, Chandra leads the reader to believe that the ghost is that of Soli, Jago Antia's brother, who was killed in an accident when he was a young boy. But that would make a far less interesting story than the one Chandra does tell, as the author well knows, since he suggests it only for the purpose of setting up the final surprise.

This final surprise—that the ghost is Jago Antia's childhood self—inevitably leads Chandra into another departure from the norms of the genre. There is nothing evil about this innocent child-ghost, quite unlike the "actively loathsome, menacing quality of modern ghosts" that Sullivan identifies as being typical.

Flowing from this is Chandra's final innovation: a happy ending. Instead of being an evil visitor from a dark, unknown realm that threatens to overwhelm the good (as in many ghost stories), the ghost in "Dharma" is an agent of positive transformation on the part

of the protagonist, Jago Antia. In this sense, Chandra has taken the genre and stood it on its head. The ghost is the harbinger not of chaos and evil but of healing, not of the rending of an order, but the restoration of it. He brings not fear but wisdom.

Source: Bryan Aubrey, Critical Essay on "Dharma," in *Short Stories for Students*, The Gale Group, 2002.

Critical Essay #2

Kelly is an instructor of creative writing and literature at Oakton Community College in Illinois. In this essay, Kelly examines the relationship between the main story told in Chandra's story and the brief section that precedes it.

Vikram Chandra's short story "Dharma," the first piece in his collection *Love and Longing in Bombay*, links two separate and distinct situations. The main story is the long tale of Major General Jago Antia, who is preoccupied with identifying and then removing a ghost that haunts his childhood home. Jago Antia's life is explained at length, starting with his first awareness of a problem on his fiftieth birthday, proceeding through his acceptance of the fact that there might be supernatural forces at work in his life, and then ending when he comes to peace with the past that haunts him. In the process, the narrative flashes back to various points in his life, showing important moments that led him to be the grown man he is at the start of the story.

The other situation that Chandra describes in this story comes in the preface to Jago Antia's tale. This section, only three pages long, concerns characters who have no direct contact with any of the characters who appear in the twenty-eight pages that are to follow. The introductory segment concerns an unnamed narrator who has recently come to Bombay to work for a computer software company, making the acquaintance of Subramaniam, a former civil servant who has retired from the Ministry of Defence after forty-one years. It is Subramaniam who, once the subject of haunted houses has been raised among friends at a bar, tells the story of Jago Antia. After Antia's story is begun, the situation presented in the beginning is never mentioned again.

Most stories told from the first person point of view, as this one is in the introductory section, are about the person who is telling it to the audience. They follow the narrator's growth, showing readers what, if anything, the events they describe mean to that particular person. In "Dharma," it is not the narrator, but Jago Antia, who is affected by the action. Readers would be right to question the method that Chandra has chosen to use. The beginning scene with the narrator and Subramaniam is interesting and it sets a mood, but it is not an integral part of the story. What it does add to the tale of Jago Antia is an artistic matter worth critical attention.

There is a simple way to rationalize the relationship between the story of Jago Antia and the story that introduces it, but the simple explanation fails to appreciate Chandra's skill. In the larger context of *Love and Longing in Bombay*, readers see that Subramaniam and the computer programming narrator appear at the beginnings of all five of the book's stories. It is possible to explain the introduction of "Dharma" as a piece of a large puzzle, one that is more significant to the other scenes containing Subramaniam than it is to the particular story in which it resides. It is true that the chain of introductions helps tie the works presented in this book together into one unit, making it more of a complete work than just a series of short stories. Still, the bond created in this way is not enough, in and of itself, to justify a break in narrative continuity between the introduction and the main story.

The collected introductions do tell a continuous story; as they progress, the computer programmer becomes increasingly understanding of the earthy worldview that he once scoffed at, drawn into Subramaniam's view of the world. Readers join the narrator in learning to love the magic of good old-fashioned story telling. The relationship that develops between the two men over time is not based on their personalities so much their mutual fascination with Subramaniam's stories, each of them carefully balanced to hold the young man's interest and to teach him about the wonders of humanity that computers cannot calculate.

By the end of the collection, the narrator calls Bombay, which he originally considers a backward and unsophisticated place, "my city," showing a love for its simple charms grown from the hypnotic spell of the old man's tales. *Love and Longing in Bombay* is really about Subramaniam's effect on the narrator, about what his love of a well-wrought story has to teach someone whose mind has been formed in the contemporary world of global information flow. What happens to Jago Antia just happens to be the first story in the book, and the vignette that precedes it happens to be the first meeting of the book's two main characters.

Viewing the story's introduction this way might satisfy some readers about its function, but it does not answer the important question of whether it helps "Dharma" as an independent story. Readers can accept its status as a part of the larger story told throughout the book, but that does not explain the relationship between Subramaniam and Jago Antia. There is no reason to leave it unexamined, simply saying that this introduction does enough by tying "Dharma" to the other four stories of the book if it can be interpreted as more than that. To be considered a legitimate, functional short story, all of the pieces of "Dharma" should have a useful relationship to each other, regardless of what else is in the collection where it ended up being printed.

The most persuasive argument that the stories about Subramaniam and Jago Antia belong together stems from the fact that Jago Antia's journey toward self-awareness parallels the narrator's overall growth throughout *Love and Longing in Bombay*. The point is made in his story, quite emphatically, that Antia believes himself to be a man of reason, who has done all that he could throughout life to combat superstition, suppress imagination, and dismiss intuition. From childhood on, he has repressed the sort of lightheartedness that once drove him to reach for a colorful kite, knocking his brother off the edge of a roof to his death.

Antia's comfort in the false structure of militarism, which started with his first uniform as a boy and reached its apex with his denying pain to amputate his own leg, gives way, at the end of the story, to an awareness of the human emotions that have been so long suppressed. His struggle for self-containment mirrors the attitude that readers recognize as the narrator's, hinted at in his brief scene in the beginning. "I spoke at length then," the narrator explains about his reaction to the idea of ghosts, "about superstition and ignorance and the state of our benighted nation, in which educated men and women believe in banshees and ghouls." His skepticism and Jago Antia's are similar, and Jago Antia's skepticism is broken down over the course of his story until he gives up his defenses. The story does not tell readers the narrator's fate, but the very fact that he

has chosen to relate this tale can be taken as some sort of indication that the story of Jago Antia means something significant to him.

The parallel between these two characters is clear, but their similarity is only significant if readers can learn about each from the other. For instance, there would be no real reason to draw the connection between them if Jago Antia's faith in the military were fundamentally different than the narrator's faith in the information age. But the two do fit together nicely, at least in this story. In a larger context, they might be considered different things— military discipline means to suppress individual curiosity, while the flow of available information serves to stimulate it. But in the context of this particular story, they both serve the same purpose, offering the characters a chance to deny the faithbased world that surrounds them.

The apparent differences between these two world views only help Chandra clarify the point that they share the same essential nature, reducing the quests for both information and self-discipline to methods of denying reality. Throughout "Dharma," the two stories seem unbalanced, with one dwarfing the other in length. Much more is told about Jago Antia than there is about the narrator, but the shorthand version of this modern lifestyle, given in the brief introduction, can serve as an outline for the main story.

One reason that the introduction is able to have an impact nearly equal to that of the main story, despite the huge differences in lengths, is the presence of Subramaniam. He is the focus of the introductory pages, the subject of the very first paragraph. In some way, he is as much the manifestation of the situation at the Fisherman's Rest, where old men gather to tell tales and to muse, as any ghost. He is clearly the story's star. In just a few pages, his personality enchants the narrator and the story's readers. Subramaniam's personality leaves readers with a strong enough impression to counterbalance all of the many details given about Jago Antia's life, which is, in itself, one reason why the introduction to "Dharma" does not seem out of place, even when the story is not read within the context of *Love and Longing in Bombay*. The narrator builds him up to be such a special character that readers remember him.

But the main question is why there is a narrator at all. This unnamed person is even more vague to readers than Jago Antia's servant, Thepa, who at least shows some individual personality by taking a familiar tone with his superior. The narrator's function is to view the situation at the Fisherman's Rest bar with the same curiosity that readers would have if they went in there. He is openly skeptical in the beginning, but the story never shows if his skepticism is diminished by the end. The answer is . . . probably. The story leaves this matter unresolved, but it would not take much to guess how it would be settled if Subramaniam and the narrator came back at the end. If most readers feel quite certain that the narrator would, like Jago Antia, become more open to the unseen world and thus more open to the strange, superstitious old men that surround him, then there really is no need for Chandra to provide such an ending. If most readers were left uncertain about how Antia's story will affect the narrator, then the two parts of "Dharma" are disconnected pieces that happen to be packaged together.

Chandra has gained more from trusting readers to draw the necessary connections in his story than he would have gained by oversimplifying. Nothing assures readers that two separate situations mentioned in the same story will relate to one another, other than the faith that they have in the writer. Without faith, readers would be left unconvinced, feeling that there is no relationship between the parts or, even worse, that the author has left the relationship mysterious because he does not understand it himself. This story does work as a single artistic piece, but it does so by asking one to look beyond that which is conventional and logical; appropriately, that also happens to be the story's message.

Source: David Kelly, Critical Essay on "Dharma," in *Short Stories for Students*, The Gale Group, 2002.

Critical Essay #3

France is a librarian and college counselor, and he also teaches at University Liggett School and Macomb Community College near Detroit, Michigan. In the following essay, France discusses both historical context and evidence of post traumatic stress disorder in Chandra's story.

Vikram Chandra's "Dharma" revolves around the character Jehangir "Jago" Antia and his coming to terms with the loss of his brother, his parents, his childhood, and one of his legs. These are all traumas that Jago can only deal with once he is released, because of his phantom pain, from Dharma, or duty. In Jago's case, specifically, this duty is the total dedication he gave to the duties of a soldier that kept him from attending to his inner self. What Jago discovers is that his memory and release from Dharma permits him to come to terms, for the first time in his life, with a traumatic past and with himself. To better understand Jago's life, though, the reader might first consider his background within a historical framework.

Chandra provides many internal details that enable the engaged reader to discern the historical and geographical context of the story. This context will be more familiar to Indian and British readers than to most American readers, making it perhaps useful to provide some background information for the latter. The story is narrated in Bombay, India, sometime in the 1990s, but most of the detailed events occur, in reverse order, in 1991, 1971, and 1947, in Bombay and Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan). This timeline can be pieced together because Jago Antia is thirty years old when his leg is mangled by an exploding land mine during street fighting in the city of Sylhet. Jago commands a battalion of paratroopers at the time, in 1971 when (historically) India invaded Bangladesh to drive the Pakistani Army out of the region. From this single event, one can go chronologically forward and backward using basic arithmetic, for Jago's "phantom pain" (he feels a pain where his real leg no longer exists) begins on his fiftieth birthday (in 1991) and his brother died when he was six (in 1947). In 1947, Hindu majority India and Muslim majority Pakistan became independent from the British Empire. The 1971 war ended with the termination of East Pakistan (separated from West Pakistan by India) and the creation of Bangladesh. This background provides a context with which to better understand Jago. But why did he become a soldier? This question also can be answered from internal details in the story.

Through memory and flashback, one learns that when Jago was six years old, he and his brother Soli adored their uncle Burjor Mama, a soldier: "They knew his arrival meant at least two weeks of unexpected pleasures, excursions to Juju, sailing trips, films, shows, and sizzling forbidden pavement foods." Jago recalls his fond feelings for his uncle once he returns to Bombay with the intention of selling his recently deceased parents' house. He has not seen the house since he left for the military academy to become a soldier himself. One of his first memories, on the way back to Bombay by train, is of seeing two fighter planes flying in the sky when he was a child. Later on, Jago recalls Burjor Mama's role as an inspiration to him. Most importantly, though, it is Burjor Mama who gives him and Soli the kite that leads to Soli's freakish accident while

playing with Jago. While the boys are playing with the kite, Soli falls a mere three feet, but far enough and at such an angle that he is killed. In shock and fear from Soli's death, part of Jago dies and remains forever a six-year old child, while the rest of him grows to embrace Dharma as a soldier like his uncle. Jago can only come to terms with his losses when he goes upstairs in his parents' home and faces the ghost of himself. An earlier detail in the story gives the reader advance notice that Jago will have this encounter. A retired military officer, Subramaniam, tells the narrator that "'Some people meet their ghosts, and some don't. But we're all haunted by them.'"

A related way of examining the story is through the concept of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). When one experiences a shocking episode or series of such episodes—trauma such as rape, assault, combat, wounding, accident—a person comes under such stress that he or she may become overwhelmed and unable to absorb the shock directly; instead, part of the traumatized person's mind emotionally splits off or shuts down and tries to block out the shock and pain. This is a physical and psychological mechanism that enables people to survive, but at a tremendous cost. Until recognized and treated, PTSD victims may endure for years with the traumatic memories seemingly suppressed, though usually certain reminders such as noises, movements, or other sensory cues will trigger anxieties, flashbacks, and fears that can never be completely overcome. Mental health professionals recommend extensive therapy over time combined with support groups to help people suffering from PTSD, but even with such help and much hard work, a sadness usually remains. In "Dharma," Jago's primary trauma occurs at the death of his brother, Soli. He cannot absorb the shock of Soli's death, and his proximity to it, without a major alteration to his psyche. In this case, Jago changes from the happy-go-lucky boy he has been when playing with his brother into a distant and serious only son. Feeling guilt and shock, he pursues a life of duty that gives him a way to endure, although, in pursuing this highly disciplined way of life, he also becomes distanced from acknowledging and addressing his pain. Unfortunately for Jago, he endures yet more trauma during his lifetime. In his case, though, Jago's later traumas eventually provide the jolts for remembering his brother's death and enable him to come to terms with it.

One may infer from the text of "Dharma" that it is the death of Jago's parents that sets the train of memory in motion that eventually allows Jago to deal with his PTSD in a productive way. Jago's fiftieth birthday comes not long after both his parents die, and it is at his birthday that he begins experiencing the phantom pain that sharply brings back memories of the day he amputated his own combat-mangled leg. Jago begins to experience some classic symptoms of PTSD. He begins to recall the two major traumas of his life, first the day of the parachute drop in 1971, when he lost his leg, and then the day in 1947 when his brother fell while Jago chased him to grab the kite he was holding. The 1987 edition of *The Merck Manual of Diagnosis and Recovery*, edited by Robert Berkow and Andrew Fletcher, notes that when a person recalls major trauma, she or he may reexperience it "against a background of chronic anxiety, hyperalertness, and insomnia," things that happen to Jago from the time he turns fifty until he faces his own childhood ghost at his parental home during the climax of the plot. Images of falling abound throughout the story, skillfully interconnecting Soli's tragic fall when Jago is a child, Jago's paratrooper jumps, his fall when the landmine explodes in the streets of

Sylhet, his recurrent falling in dreams and nightmares, and his fall down the stairs when he first tries to face up to his childhood ghost. He has broken out of another phase of PTSD that apparently affected him during his long military career, one of suppression. As *The Merck Manual* notes, a frequent characteristic of PTSD is "a numbing of their responsiveness to people, objects, and events in the world around them." From the time he is six until he turns fifty, Jago subsumes himself so completely in his military Dharma that he lives in precisely that way. This makes him an excellent professional officer but a highly damaged and unhealed human being for most of his life.

Jago comes to terms with the traumas of his life in a way that would probably not normally be prescribed by psychotherapists. It is his way of doing so that makes "Dharma" unique, tied as it is to Bombay and Indian culture. For this is a story of dealing with PTSD in traditional Bombay terms, set in a clear historical context that underscores the survivability of old traditions, something the narrator is skeptical of before Subramaniam tells Jago's story. "Even in the information age," the narrator had lamented, "we will never be free" of what he had assumed was superstition. But the reader discovers that what seems superstition has deeper and real meaning. Slowly but surely, Jago lets go of modern cures and resorts to what works for him. After realizing that there is indeed a ghost in his parents' house and that modern rationalism will not drive it out, Jago brings in Thakker, the exorcist who, after realizing that only Jago can release the lost ghost, guides Jago in what to do. Jago's case of PTSD is so extreme, he has been so "lost" since the death of Soli, that part of him has died and has haunted him, not knowing where to go. Once Jago speaks to the ghost of his split childhood self, he can find "a kind of solitude." Once he has found that, he can sell his parents' house, continue to see friends and acquaintances (what therapists might call an informal support group), and live out the remainder of his life in relative peace. Even if he may not become entirely happy again (after all, the happy-go-lucky part of him died at six along with Soli), he feels "free." Thus, the denouement of "Dharma" is upbeat but philosophical, and the reader is left to ponder his or her own life and wonder at the mysteriousness of existence, the relevance of rational thinking, and our time on Earth.

Source: Erik France, Critical Essay on "Dharma," in *Short Stories for Students*, The Gale Group, 2002.

Topics for Further Study

In "Dharma," Jago Antia leads Indian forces against those of Pakistan during the war between India and Pakistan in 1971. Research this war. What was the cause? What was the outcome? Why did India support East Pakistan, now Bangladesh? Why is there continuing hostility between India and Pakistan today?

Read a ghost story by another author and compare it to "Dharma." Which is the more successful as a ghost story and why?

One of the reasons Chandra writes stories is to express a variety of, what he called, "visions of the world." What vision of the world is conveyed by "Dharma?" What worldview is implied by a belief in ghosts? Is a belief in ghosts and other supernatural phenomena incompatible with a scientific worldview?

Watch a video of the 2000 movie The Kid, in which the adult character, played by Bruce Willis, encounters his childhood self. Are there any parallels in this movie to the story told in "Dharma?" If you were able to encounter your seven-year-old self, as Jago Antia does in the story, what do you think he or she might say to you? And what would you say to him or her?

What Do I Read Next?

Red Earth and Pouring Rain (1995) is Chandra's epic and magical realist first novel, set not only in India but also in the United States. It contains many stories-within-stories of passion, fate, love, and war, told by a monkey in whom dwells the soul of a poet named Sanjay.

The Haunted Looking Glass: Ghost Stories (2001), edited by Edward Gorey, is a reprint of a classic collection first published in 1959. It features twelve stories from the Victorian and Edwardian period, including work by Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, Bram Stoker, R. H. Malden, and Robert Louis Stevenson.

The Oxford Book of Twentieth-Century Ghost Stories (1996), edited by Michael Cox, contains thirty-three ghost stories, including works by such well known authors as Edith Wharton, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Muriel Spark, and William Trevor.

Midnight's Children (1981), by Salman Rushdie, won Britain's Booker Prize and is the novel that sparked the current interest in Indian fiction. The title refers to the thousand people who were born at midnight on August 15, 1947, the moment that the independent countries of India and Pakistan were born. The novel shows how their fate over the next thirty years is bound up with that of their country.

The God of Small Things (1998), Arundhati Roy's critically acclaimed first novel, traces the decline of a once-distinguished South Indian family over the course of three decades from the 1960s to the 1990s.

One of Chandra's favorite novelists is Amitav Ghosh. His novel The Glass Palace (2001) is a saga set in Burma, India, and Malaysia over a period of more than a century. Family life and love are depicted in the context of the political conflicts of the regions.

The Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe is one of the foremost writers of postcolonialism. His Girls at War, And Other Stories (1991) contains twelve stories that cover a twenty-year period of his writing.

Bombay, the setting of "Dharma" and of much Indian fiction written in English, is India's most modern city. Bombay—Mosaic of Arts and Letters (1996), edited by Sujata Patel and Alice Thorner, examines present-day conditions in the city from an inter-disciplinary perspective. It includes chapters on various aspects of the history of Bombay as well as sections on Bombay in literature and poetry; Bombay's architecture; and on the art, theater, film, and music of the city.

Further Study

Agarwal, Ramlal, Review of Love and Longing in Bombay, in World Literature Today, Vol. 72, No. 1, Winter 1998, p. 206.

This review presents a rather negative appraisal of the stories in the book, which, according to the reviewer, meander on for too long.

Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds., The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures, Routledge Kegan & Paul, 1990.

Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin provide a seminal study of postcolonial writing in cultures as diverse as India, Australia, the West Indies, Africa, and Canada.

Dharwadker, Vinay, "Indian Writing Today: A View from 1994," in World Literature Today, Vol. 68, No. 2, Spring 1994, pp. 237-41.

This is a review of the main themes of Indian literature since the 1970s. Dharwadker identifies death, dismemberment, and dislocation as common themes, used as a response to colonialism. Antirealism, in the form of allegories and magic realism, also became common.

Gandhi, Leela, Postcolonial Theory, Cambridge University Press, 1998.

This is a survey that covers current debates about the scope and content of postcolonialist studies.

Gupta, R. K., "Trends in Modern Indian Fiction," in World Literature Today, Vol. 68, No. 2, Spring 1994, pp. 299-308.

Gupta argues that, although modern Indian fiction is rich and creative, it is limited because Indian writers show little concern for social responsibility, lack depth in presenting India's political and social problems, and write on only a limited number of themes.

Bibliography

Berkow, Robert, and Andrew J. Fletcher, eds., *The Merck Manual of Diagnosis and Therapy*, 15th ed., Merck Sharp & Dohme Research Laboratories, 1987, pp. 1507-08.

Chandra, Vikram, "The Cult of Authenticity: India's Cultural Commissars Worship 'Indianness' instead of Art," in *Boston Review*, February-March 2000.

Hussein, Aamer, "Bombay Music," in the *Times Literary Supplement*, March 28, 1987, p. 21.

King, Francis, "An Acknowledged Expert," in the *Spectator*, March 22, 1997, p. 41.

Mahoney, Kevin, "Interview with Vikram Chandra," in Genre, Summer 1998, available at http://www.geocities. com/SoHo/Nook/1082/vikram-chandra.html (last accessed April 2, 2002).

Radhakrishan, The Hindu View of Life, Unwin, 1965, p. 56.

Review of "Dharma," in Kirkus Reviews, January 1, 1997.

Review of "Dharma," in Publishers Weekly, January 21, 1997.

Rushdie, Salman, "Damme, This is the Oriental Scene for You!" in the New Yorker, June 23-30, 1997, pp. 50-61.

Sullivan, Jack, Elegant Nightmares: The English Ghost Story from Le Fanu to Blackwood, Ohio University Press, 1978.

Tharoor, Shashi, "The New India," in the New York Times, May 18, 1997.

Wallace, Edgar, "The Ghost of Down Hill," in the Mammoth Book of Twentieth Century Ghost Stories, edited by Peter Haining, Carroll & Graf Publishers, 1998, pp. 88-130.

Copyright Information

This Premium Study Guide is an offprint from *Short Stories for Students*.

Project Editor
David Galens

Editorial
Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

Research
Michelle Campbell, Nicodemus Ford, Sarah Genik, Tamara C. Nott, Tracie Richardson

Data Capture
Beverly Jendrowski

Permissions
Mary Ann Bahr, Margaret Chamberlain, Kim Davis, Debra Freitas, Lori Hines, Jackie Jones, Jacqueline Key, Shalice Shah-Caldwell

Imaging and Multimedia
Randy Bassett, Dean Dauphinais, Robert Duncan, Leitha Etheridge-Sims, Mary Grimes, Lezlie Light, Jeffrey Matlock, Dan Newell, Dave Oblender, Christine O'Bryan, Kelly A. Quin, Luke Rademacher, Robyn V. Young

Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
http://www.gale.com

Introduction

Purpose of the Book

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

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

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

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

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

Selection Criteria

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

How Each Entry Is Organized

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

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

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

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

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

Other Features

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

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

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

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

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

Citing Short Stories for Students

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We Welcome Your Suggestions

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

Editor, Short Stories for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535