# The Diamond Mine Study Guide

## The Diamond Mine by Willa Cather

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# Introduction

Willa Cather's short story "The Diamond Mine" was first published in *McClure's* magazine in 1916, although it almost was not published at all. The story was a blatant, fictionalized account of the life of Lillian Nordica, an American soprano, and publishers feared a lawsuit. The story was reprinted four years later in the collection *Youth and the Bright Medusa*, which featured other stories about the lives of artists in the early twentieth century. At the time the story was written, the worldwide popularity of opera singers and other artists was increasing, and many stars, including women, were becoming rich and celebrated. However, as Cather illustrates with her opera singer, Cressida Garnet in "The Diamond Mine," the money and success can inspire envy and hatred in an artist's family and friends. This, along with the emotional toil inherent in a publicized art career, can drain a person. Critics have interpreted the story as a reinforcement of Cather's belief that art should be done for art's sake, and not for fame or money.

This art theme is prevalent in many of Cather's other works, including three other stories in *Youth and the Bright Medusa:* "A Gold Slipper," "Scandal," and "Coming, Aphrodite!" In addition, "The Diamond Mine" is often compared to Cather's novel, *The Song of the Lark* (1915), which also concerns an opera singer.

Although many critics have praised her stories that deal with artists, Cather is best-known for her stories about life on the Nebraska prairie, including her 1913 novel, *O Pioneers!* and *One of Ours* (1922), the latter of which earned the Pulitzer Prize. A current copy of "The Diamond Mine" can be found in Cather's *Collected Stories*, published by Vintage Classics in 1992.

# Author Biography

Willa Cather was born on December 7, 1873 in Back Creek Valley, Virginia. Her family resided in this state for the first decade of her life, then relocated to Red Cloud, Nebraska. It was not until her family's move that Cather began attending school regularly. At this time in her life, she showed a keen interest in science and accompanied a local doctor on his house calls, eventually assisting him with his patients. Cather intended to become a physician when she grew up. During this time, she also made some decisive choices about her identity and adopted a masculine appearance and manner. She was also known to sign her name as "William Cather, Jr.," or "William Cather M.D."

In addition to her science and medical interests, Cather also displayed a talent for acting and writing. She often wrote plays and recitations to perform for her family's entertainment. She also acted in amateur theatricals that were performed at the Red Cloud Opera House. Throughout Cather's life, she would show an interest in all aspects of the arts.

In 1891, Cather began attending the University of Nebraska, where she excelled in language and literature. By her junior year, she took on editorship of the school's literary journal. It was here that she began publishing some of her own short stories, and by the time she graduated, she had also become a full-time reporter and critic for the *Nebraska State Journal*. Shortly after graduating, Cather moved to Pittsburgh to become the editor of *Home Monthly*, a short-lived women's magazine. She then moved to New York City and took over the managing editorship for *McClure's* magazine, where she worked until 1912, and where she increased her literary reputation. Even after she left *McClure's*, she maintained her relationship with the magazine and continued to publish her stories. In 1916, the magazine printed "The Diamond Mine," the last story that she published in *McClure's*. Four years later, in 1920, Cather included this story in the collection *Youth and the Bright Medusa*, which highlighted her interest in the arts.

In 1922, Cather received a Pulitzer Prize for fiction for her novel *One of Ours.* Besides her works that dealt with the lives of popular artists, Cather is acknowledged for her prairie tales like *O, Pioneers!* (1913) and *My Antonia* (1918), both of which drew upon her background in rural Nebraska. Cather died of a cerebral hemorrhage on April 24, 1947, in New York City.

# Plot Summary

## The Voyage

"The Diamond Mine" begins when the narrator, Caroline, an old friend of the famous opera singer, Cressida Garnet, recounts the voyage where Cressida announced her fourth marriage, to Jerome Brown. When Cressida makes her first appearance, she displays the characteristic energy and attention to detail that have made her one of the most soughtafter opera stars.

Caroline notes the presence of Miss Julia Garnet, Cressida's fifty-year-old sister, and Cressida's son, Horace, a bored young man of twenty-two. Caroline sees Miletus Poppas, Cressida's Greek accompanist, and strikes up a conversation with him. Caroline and Poppas walk over to the deck chairs where Cressida is lounging, and she jumps up to greet Caroline. The two women walk to a different part of the ship, where they talk about her recent engagement to Jerome Brown. Cressida says that with the exception of her son—who Caroline secretly notes can be easily bought—nobody else is supporting the marriage.

## Cressida's Family

Caroline notes Poppas, Miss Julia, and Horace sitting in the deck chairs, and speculates how the latter two would hurt Cressida—the financial and emotional hand that feeds them—if they had the chance. Caroline thinks about the other Garnets in Cressida's family, and how they try to capitalize on Cressida's fame by putting on airs in their native Columbus, Ohio. Caroline also notices how their constant notes requesting money from Cressida strain the singer very much, and how their envy for her is so much that they want to be Cressida.

One evening on the voyage, Cressida talks to Caroline in more detail about Jerome Brown. At this point, Caroline briefly remembers Cressida's first husband, Charley Wilton, an organist who died from tuberculosis. Wilton was Horace's father and Caroline's cousin. Cressida says that she's marrying Brown because she has always been able to count on him, and he has never pushed her, unlike others have. They talk about Cressida's family, who are jealous that the singer is the only talented one.

## Cressida's First Two Husbands

Caroline remembers meeting Cressida when they were both girls in Ohio, and starts thinking about Cressida's past husbands, beginning with Wilton, who was her first music teacher. Her second husband, Ransome McChord, did not approve of Cressida's close friendship with Poppas and forced her to choose between them; she chose Poppas. Their association has been mutually beneficial, as Poppas has helped her to develop her singing skill, while she has made Poppas a rich man in the process. This is a

constant worry to the rest of the Garnets, who feel that Poppas is getting money that should be theirs.

## Blasius Bouchalka

Caroline notes that it is Cressida's stability and professionalism that win singing jobs, often over others who are more talented but difficult to deal with. Cressida only strayed from this strength of character once with Blasius Bouchalka. Caroline remembers back to the evening that she and Cressida first met Bouchalka, a Bohemian, when the two women were walking around New York and decided to stop for dinner at a restaurant. Bouchalka, the violinist and director of the restaurant's orchestra, notices Cressida. He gives the orchestra a new, unusual composition to play and Cressida leaves him a card, thanking him for the wonderful performance.

The next week, Caroline visits Cressida and sees that Bouchalka has sent Cressida some of his music. Cressida invites Bouchalka over the following Sunday to one of her weekly gatherings, where he talks about his life of poverty. He eats some of Cressida's muffins and cakes, and is surprised to find out that Cressida's cook is from Bohemia as well. Bouchalka talks to Caroline about his music, but says that the publishers are biased and do not want Bohemian songs. Cressida pulls Bouchalka aside and talks with him at length, until he realizes that he is late for work at the restaurant, and rushes out. Several weeks later, after they have heard nothing from Bouchalka, the two women go back to the restaurant, where they find out that he was fired for being late. The two women are able to track him down, and after this, Cressida starts promoting his work at her concerts and to publishers.

Bouchalka gets sick, and Cressida and Caroline go check on him, finding him in a rundown boardinghouse, where Cressida comforts him. After he gets better, he starts seeing Cressida more frequently. He idolizes the singer, and for the first time in her life, she feels truly appreciated, and starts to want something more than the life of servitude that she has with her family. Cressida and Bouchalka are married later that year, and when they return from their honeymoon and her concerts abroad, Cressida is refreshed. She begins to lighten up a little and become a little more careless, although Caroline notes that this is good for her.

Bouchalka becomes enamored of the rich lifestyle he has married into, and people start to notice that he has lost his wildness and that his domestication has affected his artistic output. He is content to sit in the house, where he eats the various creations from Ruzenka, and puts on weight. He refuses to go on tour with Cressida, and it starts to take its toll on her. In an attempt to spark some life into their marriage, Cressida cancels a rehearsal for her Chicago concert and goes home to surprise Bouchalka. It is a surprise, as she finds him in bed with Ruzenka, the Bohemian chef, who is sent away the next morning.

Bouchalka is not too far behind. When Cressida returns from her Chicago engagement, she stays in a hotel while the divorce papers are drawn up. Meanwhile, Bouchalka goes

to see Cressida, miserable. He had been drunk the night he slept with Ruzenka, and he says that he wishes Cressida could forgive him, as he would her if she ever slept with Poppas while on the road. At this point, Caroline cuts him off, and he admits that he knows Cressida would never betray him that way.

## Cressida's Death

Caroline finally remembers Cressida's last husband, Jerome Brown, who did the most damage to the singer. Brown is a financier who insists on investing Cressida's money in a number of unsuccessful ventures. Although Cressida tries to inquire about these investments, Brown does not give her any details, and the strain starts to take its toll on the singer, who is distraught when she finds out that she needs to put a mortgage on her house. Cressida had never worried about earning money before, but at this point decides to go to England for a special money-raising tour. She returns on the ill-fated maiden voyage of the *Titanic* but, unlike past voyages, her lodgings on the ship are modest, and located in the lower decks. Caroline notes that Cressida was ill and apparently never left her cabin as the ship was going down.

Following Cressida's death, Caroline and Cressida's lawyer, Henry Gilbert, are named the executors of the singer's will. Since Brown has invested most of the fortune away, there is not much left to divide. Still, Poppas gets a third of the money, which Jerome Brown and the Garnets contest, unsuccessfully. Caroline notes by the letters from Brown and Cressida's relatives that none of them realized that the fortune they had enjoyed had come from one woman, instead treating her like a natural diamond mine that would continually provide them with wealth. Caroline further notes how Cressida's family went through the singer's house floor by floor, squabbling over who should get the smallest item, and that this squabbling continued long after Cressida's death. Caroline writes to Poppas, who has retired in Asia, of these horrors.

# Part 1

## Part 1 Summary

As this story begins, there is a flurry of activity among some assembled photographers, as Cressida Garnet, a famed singer, boards a cruise ship in New York City. The ship is headed to London, where Cressida has several appearances scheduled. As she makes her way onto the ship, she gladly stops to have her picture taken, and takes her time to pose for the photographers. The narrator, an old friend of Cressida's named Carrie, thinks that given Cressida's advancing age and the fact that she has recently announced her intentions to marry for the fourth time, it is wise that she oblige the photographers in this manner.

Soon, Carrie's gaze turns from Cressida and the photographers to Cressida's traveling party. With her are her ever-present sister, Miss Julia, and twenty-two year old Horace, Cressida's only son. Only too familiar with the expectations placed upon them as members of Cressida's inner circle, they obligingly wait for her to finish with the photographers before making their way to their staterooms. Looking around further, Carrie spots Miletus Poppas, Cressida's long-time accompanist, and thinks to herself that everyone except Jerome Brown, Cressida's current fiancy, is present for the journey.

After the ship has left port and has been at sea for a few hours, Carrie comes upon Poppas on deck. She asks the musician if Cressida has any performances planned during her stay in London, to which Poppas replies that indeed, she has. Soon the conversation turns to Poppas' suffering of facial neuralgia, a condition that apparently still plagues him. Poppas indicates that the trip to London will only exacerbate his condition and that it is his intention to eventually retire to a remote city in the middle of Asia, if and when Cressida decides she no longer needs his services.

As they talk, they make their way toward the area where Cressida is sitting. Upon seeing her friend, Cressida rises from her lounge chair to greet her. While Cressida seems genuinely happy to see Carrie, Horace and Miss Julia only offer perfunctory greetings. After exchanging minor pleasantries, Carrie and Cressida walk away so that they can talk privately.

As they begin talking, Cressida tells Carrie that she expected she would see her at some point during this trip, since she always manages to turn up at critical periods in her life. When Carrie indicates that she has heard news of Cressida's engagement, Cressida replies that, with the exception of Horace, those around her have not received the news very well. Carrie thinks that Horace's support can usually be easily bought, but wisely chooses not to share this thought with her friend.

Apparently hoping to change the subject, Cressida asks Carrie if she has been to Columbus lately, but then quickly asks her not to tell her about it. Growing melancholy,

Cressida wonders why there are few events in her life that she would choose to revisit and why a certain aura of bleakness and sadness seems to have followed her as she has journeyed through her life. Then, realizing she is beginning to sound depressing, she brightens up, explaining that the sea air always briefly makes her melancholy. In an effort to make her feel better, Carrie indicates that she thinks Miss Julia's presence has a sobering effect on Cressida, to which Cressida agrees, saying that unfortunately, her sister has come to expect to be able to accompany her on these types of trips.

The deck steward who, hands Cressida an envelope containing a wireless message interrupts the women's conversation. Cressida eagerly opens the envelope and then, somewhat flustered, explains to Carrie that the message is from Jerome and that it contains some information he had forgotten to tell her before she departed. She asks Carrie how long she expects to be in London and expresses her wish that she will meet Jerome, adding that she believes they will be married as soon as her appearances there are finished. Cressida then excuses herself, saying she has some letters to write and tells Carrie that they will have to dine together at some point during the trip.

As they walk toward Cressida's stateroom, they see Horace, Miss Julia, and Poppas reclining in deck chairs. Poppas begins to get up so that he can be of assistance to Cressida, but she motions for him to remain seated. As she watches the trio, Carrie realizes how intricately attached each of them is to Cressida and wonders what they would do if Cressida were no longer able to provide for them in the manner that she has. While she can't be entirely sure, Carrie is almost certain that Horace and Julia would abandon her, but that Poppas would remain a faithful servant.

As the seas grow rougher and the weather colder, Julia rises from her lounge chair and returns to her stateroom. Carrie is relieved to be temporarily freed from her presence but is also grateful that it was Julia and not Cressida's other sister, Georgie, who accompanied her on this trip. It is no secret that Julia and Georgie are quite jealous of Cressida's success, and despite the generosity and extravagance Cressida displays toward her siblings, both women harbor a certain amount of bitterness at not being invited to come live with their famous sister in New York City. Both women recognize the struggle Cressida endured to achieve her fame and fortune, and as a result, they not only covet their sister's wealth, but also the perseverance that enabled her to get to this point in her life.

The next several days bring rough weather and force Julia to remain close to the cabin. With Horace engaged in the ship's cardroom and Poppas likewise distracted by women, Carrie is able to spend a great deal of time with Cressida. Eventually, the conversation turns to Cressida's impending wedding, and she explains that this is not a decision that has been made in haste, but rather one that has been grounded in years of building mutual trust. As Cressida speaks, Carrie recalls her friend's first marriage, one that unfortunately lasted only three years. Tragically, Cressida's first husband had contracted tuberculosis shortly after Horace was born, forcing the young woman to care for her husband as well as to be the family's provider. Carrie recalls thinking that anyone who has had to endure an ordeal like that deserves every possible chance at achieving marital happiness.

As the two women continue to talk, Cressida says she believes that her siblings view her as a greedy woman who has amassed a fortune, while leaving nothing for the rest of them. She thinks that they seem to forget that there was a time in her life when she needed to worry about having enough money to bury her dying husband. Recalling those dark days, she says she often wonders why she didn't kill herself and end the pain. Then, referring to her subsequent failed marriages, she says that perhaps it would have been better if she had taken lovers instead.

Horace, who asks the women if they would like to go for a walk before retiring for the evening, soon interrupts their conversation. Carrie declines the offer, and so Cressida joins her son alone. Carrie realizes that in the quiet of the night, she can clearly hear their conversation as they walk along the deck. After hearing of Horace's losses in the cardroom, she suggests to her son that he find other ways to entertain himself for the duration of the trip, a suggestion that he does not take well. Rather than argue with her son, Cressida walks away and disappears into her stateroom.

## Part 1 Analysis

As this story begins, we are immediately given a glimpse into the character of Cressida Garnet. We learn that she is a famous opera singer who, in addition to appearing regularly in New York's Metropolitan Opera, performs in famous opera houses abroad. She is, in every sense of the word, a diva, who despite her insistence that she is trying to remain incognito, dresses in flowing scarves and large hats. We also learn that she is about to marry her fourth husband and that her family - namely her son and her siblings - have come to rely on her success as a means of ensuring their financial stability.

The significance of the story's title, *The Diamond Mine*, is alluded to early; Cressida's wealth has afforded her the ability to care for her sisters, her son, and three husbands to date. We have already learned that her family has become quite accustomed to the financial assistance Cressida has been able to provide; as Carrie so astutely notes, "Horace's support, such as it was, could always be had in exchange for his mother's signature," a direct reference to the fact that he is easily influenced by money. The same can be said for the other people who have significant roles in Cressida's life. In fact, as Carrie notes, her siblings, her son, and even Poppas "were all woven into the pattern of one large and rather splendid life. Each had a bond, and each had a grievance." As a result, it does not come as much of a surprise that Cressida's announcement that she is about to wed her fourth husband is met with her family's displeasure.

Given the fact that her most recent marriage ended in her paying a considerable sum of money to her former husband as part of their divorce settlement, we are quickly left with the notion that her family is more concerned with the continuity of their financial well-being than they are with Cressida's happiness. Indeed, she appears quite happy at the prospect of marrying Jerome Brown and claims that, unlike her other husbands, he is a man she could count on if she needed help.

Aside from Carrie and Poppas, Cressida has not been able to count on very many people during her lifetime. Her siblings, while present and willing traveling companions, are more consumed by what Cressida can do for them than by thoughts of what they can do for her. Interestingly, although her sisters go to great lengths to demonstrate that they are kin to Cressida- and therefore her social and economic equals- they do not offer the emotional support she often needs. In contrast, although Carrie's reasons for being on the same voyage as Cressida are unclear, it seems likely that she booked the passage for the sole purpose of being able to spend time with her friend and to see if she needed any type of emotional support.

Cressida herself alludes to this when she tells Carrie that she always seems to show up when Cressida needs her most. For her own part, Carrie seems to have an intuition that something isn't quite right; in fact, she notes that there is a sort of "vagueness" in Cressida's reasoning for this marriage that had been missing from her previous announcements. Despite Cressida's fondness for her friend, however, her sisters seem to distrust Carrie, an emotion likely borne of their jealousy of the emotional bond Carrie shares with their sister.

The details we are provided regarding Cressida's first marriage to Charley Wilton give us an indication that Cressida is still suffering from the wounds of her past. As this period in Cressida's life is described by Carrie, we are given an indication that more tragedy is to come: "her courage during the three years of her first marriage was fine enough to foreshadow her future to any discerning eye..."

The first indication that something may be amiss in Cressida's relationship with Jerome Brown comes when the two women are talking on the ship's deck. Recall the portion within this section in which a porter brings Cressida a wire; while not much is made of this at the time it occurs, it is important to take note of the haste with which she reads the message, tucks it away and tries to disengage herself from her conversation with Carrie. Clearly, something is wrong, though we don't yet know what it is.

# Part 2

## Part 2 Summary

Carrie and Cressida first met in grammar school in their hometown of Columbus, Ohio. Cressida's family was originally from North Carolina, and her father was devoted to the Democratic Party. Carrie recalls there being something in the demeanor of all the Garnet children - with the exception of Cressida - that made them seem as though they felt they were owed something. Cressida, on the other hand, was an engaging, happy child.

The death of Cressida's first husband was, in Carrie's opinion, the first event in a long line of occurrences that could only be described as bad luck. Carrie is sure that any other woman could not have endured what Cressida has gone through with her family, her son and her husbands. Her sisters marvel at her being able to go through her life "untouched by the breath of scandal," even when others had suggested that Cressida's relationship with Poppas had scandalous potential.

As for Poppas, Cressida unilaterally credits him for her success. So loyal is she to her accompanist and coach that when forced to choose between him and her second husband, she chose Poppas. Yet, as far as Carrie could tell, their relationship never went beyond that of pupil and teacher. More importantly, the two have a mutual respect for each other, borne of the fact that Poppas also knows that his success is a direct result of Cressida's hard work.

Despite this loyalty, Cressida's siblings despise Poppas and fear that he remains in Cressida's life only so that he can benefit from her success. Further, they openly blame him for the end of her second marriage. This distrust has driven a wedge between the Garnets and Poppas, and so most of the time, they merely tolerate each other for Cressida's sake. Even so, Poppas periodically reminds the Garnets that if they continue to argue in this manner, it is likely that Cressida will pull the financial rug out from under all of them.

At the end of this section, in spite of Cressida's winsome ways and dedicated work ethic, there had been a period in her life when she had nearly sacrificed her principles. When Carrie had last seen Cressida, her relationship with her third husband, Blasius Bouchalka had still been in full swing; eventually, though, for reasons that will become clear in the story's next section, Cressida had decided to end the marriage.

## Part 2 Analysis

In this section, more about the complex relationship between Cressida and Poppas is revealed; indeed, Cressida's success could probably be attributed almost completely to this man who has served as her mentor and accompanist almost from the beginning of her career. Even so, her sisters fail to recognize this important fact and believe that it is

Cressida who is responsible for Poppas' success. In the end, both statements are true; neither could have attained such great success without the other.

Even so, Cressida's commitment to Poppas is so strong that when forced to choose between him and her second husband, she chooses Poppas, a fact that further infuriates her sisters. While this may seem like an extreme reaction to many, Cressida's devotion to her accompanist illustrates the extent to which she lacks trust and loyalty in other parts of her life. Indeed, her own husband did not trust her with Poppas, and despite her insistence that Poppas only had her best interests in mind, her sisters did not trust him.

As this section ends, there is another indication that more tragedy is to come when Cressida notes that her marriage to Bouchalka marked a brief period during which she "very nearly escaped her destiny."

# Part 3

## Part 3 Summary

In this section, Carrie recounts the history of Cressida's relationship with Blasius Bouchalka. Her narration fades to the past, where it is winter and one of the first snow storms of the year has just ended; Carrie and Cressida have decided to take a walk in New York's Central Park. Carrie describes it as a glorious afternoon; Cressida apparently shared that sentiment, for when the carriage arrived at five o'clock to take the women home, she ordered the driver to go back without them, saying that she and Carrie would have dinner uptown and return later in the evening.

As the women walk, Carrie realizes that given Cressida's level of fame, walking in the park without one of her many attendants turns their outing into a kind of adventure. Cressida, who comments on the beauty of the new-fallen snow and says that she hasn't felt this carefree in quite some time, interrupts Carrie's thoughts. She tells Carrie that nights like this make her think of Charley Wilton, her first husband. Apparently in a nostalgic mood, Cressida says that while it was unfortunate that Charley died so young, she was glad to have shared that single year with him. In fact, she says, if she were nineteen again and found herself faced with the decision of whether or not to marry Charley, she still would, even if it meant that she would have to endure the pain of losing him again.

The two women walk on and after exiting the park decide to dine at a little restaurant nearby. Although Cressida prefers to dine in places like this because she believes that fewer people will recognize her, Carrie thinks her efforts to avoid recognition are futile. The women select their table, and as they settle into their seats, an orchestra begins to entertain the patrons. Given the flourish with which the music begins, Cressida realizes that they have been recognized, but even so she immediately becomes enchanted with the sound of the violin; because she is seated with her back to the orchestra, she asks Carrie to describe the violin player. The man is young, tall, big boned, and rugged looking. He is wearing tight clothes and his actions suggest that he is either overly excited or dramatic.

As the number ends and the audience applauds, Cressida glances over her shoulder and tells Carrie that, based on his appearance, she thinks that the violin player is either very poor or in some type of trouble. Meanwhile, the violinist is rummaging through a pile of music; upon finding what he is looking for, he goes to converse with the piano player. While Carrie and Cressida cannot hear what he is saying, it is clear that he is trying to persuade his accompanist to tackle a piece that they have not rehearsed. He eventually succeeds, and while the pianist has trouble keeping up at times, the women think the duet is brilliant.

During the remainder of their meal, the music continues, and while it generally does not equal the brilliance of the duet, the women enjoy it immensely. Before leaving the

restaurant, Cressida writes a short note to the orchestra's director thanking him for making their meal so enjoyable. As they leave the restaurant, Carrie is sure she sees the violin player watching them leave. Cressida takes note of this as well and tells Carrie that she thinks that the young man has been struggling financially and is trying his hardest to be noticed so that perhaps he will get his big "break." She also believes that the young man is quite earnest in his pursuit and is eager to make a living as a musician as opposed to having to resort to the generosity of others.

While visiting Cressida's home a few weeks later, Carrie comes across an unfamiliar musical score in the music room. When Cressida enters the room and sees Carrie looking at the score, she tells her that Blasius Bouchalka, the young violinist from the restaurant, had sent it. Further, she tells Carrie that Poppas has already looked at the score and thinks it is quite good. She asks Carrie to look them over to see what she thinks. As Carrie sits as the piano and plays through the music, she thinks it is quite good as well. When she voices her opinion to Cressida, it is clear that her friend is pleased; she tells Carrie that Bouchalka will be visiting on Sunday and that she would like Carrie to be there as well.

When Carrie arrives the following Sunday at the appointed time, she finds that Bouchalka has already arrived; in fact, based on the conversation he is having with Cressida, it appears as though he has been there for quite some time. As the other guests begin to come in, their conversation ceases, and Carrie leads Bouchalka into the drawing room. On the way, she asks him if he recognized Cressida the night they were in the restaurant for dinner. Bouchalka indicates that he indeed had, and that he had heard her sing many times. He also tells Carrie that while he plays the violin out of necessity, his real passion is composing.

When a servant comes with cakes and muffins, Bouchalka helps himself to some of each. He explains to Carrie that although the establishment provides his meals where he works, he has tired of the food there. As he eats the cakes, he realizes that they are similar to those made in his native land. When Carrie points this out to Cressida, she tells him she will see to it that he has more. Within a few minutes, Horace arrives bearing more tea and a plate of cakes for Bouchalka. As they continue to talk, Carrie realizes that Bouchalka is young - perhaps not yet thirty. Carrie finds him to be a pleasant conversationalist; when the conversation turns to the subject of his music, however, he becomes agitated and less at ease.

Eventually, Carrie and Bouchalka make their way back into the music room. Bouchalka is clearly ill at ease among these people and remains on the outer fringe of the gathering until Cressida takes him aside under the guise of showing him a piece of music. The two engage in a lengthy conversation that ends only when Bouchalka looks at his watch and realizes that he is late for his job. After muttering a hasty good-bye, he dashes off.

Later that evening, Cressida tells Carrie what she has learned about him. Bouchalka was born in Austria, and his parents were both poor musicians. His mother died when he was a young boy and he was sent to live with an uncle who desired that the young

Bouchalka enter the priesthood. Bouchalka was then sent to a monastery where he was to study for this. While there, though, he met the monastery's organist, himself a brilliant musician. The organist nurtured Bouchalka's talent, and when he was twenty-one, realizing he could not fulfill his uncle's dream, he ran away from the monastery and eventually found work with a gypsy band that played in different Austrian towns. He had arrived in New York a year before Cressida first saw him in the restaurant.

Several weeks pass, and neither Cressida nor Carrie see or hear from Bouchalka. One night, they visit the restaurant where they first saw him but find that another violinist is now leading the orchestra. After questioning the piano player, they learn that Bouchalka had been fired the day he visited Cressida's home. Apparently, he had been late for work several times in the past and had already been warned that any additional tardiness would result in his termination. The piano player gives the women the address of the boarding house where Bouchalka had been living, but tells them that he may have moved on.

Eventually, they track him down, and Cressida helps him in numerous ways; she obtains a position for him with the symphony orchestra, performs some of his compositions at the Metropolitan Opera, and succeeds in interesting a publisher in his work. Within a few months, Bouchalka is on his feet and no longer looks as though he is a poor, struggling musician. He becomes a regular fixture at Cressida's on Sunday afternoons and always treats her with a great deal of respect and admiration, which, of course, Cressida relishes. Meanwhile, as Bouchalka begins to spend more time at Cressida's home, Poppas' presence is notably diminished.

One March afternoon, Cressida bursts into Carrie's apartment, and after complaining that she has just endured a terrible rehearsal, she tells her friend that Bouchalka is terribly ill and that she would like to go visit him. They make their way to the boarding house where Bouchalka lives and are greeted by the nurse who is tending to him. As Cressida leans over Bouchalka to tell him she is there, she lays her cloak across his bed. Bouchalka draws the cloak under his chin and clutches it. The two women remain with Bouchalka for more than an hour, and when they leave, Cressida leaves the cloak with him.

Bouchalka eventually recovers and becomes even more devoted to Cressida. Cressida enjoys the attention and does everything she can to make sure she does not lose his affections. Carrie notices that Cressida seems to have come alive in the recent months, and so is not surprised when her friend finally confides that she is in love. As she prepares to marry Bouchalka, she takes care to ensure that the needs of the other people in her life are addressed; she invests more money in her brother's business, sends Horace to school, and gives Poppas a raise. Cressida and Bouchalka are married in June.

When they return to New York in October, Carrie thinks that both Cressida and Bouchalka appear to be entirely refreshed. Cressida approaches her work with a newfound sense of purpose and enjoyment but without the driven nature that she had always had before. Bouchalka looks less hungry and seems to enjoy all of the trappings

of Cressida's high profile lifestyle. The couple host many social gatherings and are wonderful hosts. When Cressida's Metropolitan Opera company goes on tour, Bouchalka accompanies her.

As time goes on, however, it appears as though Bouchalka is losing interest in his work and is content to merely stay at home surrounded by all of their wonderful things. Although many believe he is working on an opera, Bouchalka isn't doing much work at all; indeed, all he seems to be doing is eating and enjoying fine wines. When Carrie drops in unexpectedly one night in the midst of a snowstorm, he seems content in the knowledge that he no longer has to worry about being cold during the harsh winter months. It occurs to Carrie that perhaps Bouchalka's ability to write the beautiful music that she had heard when they first met was borne of the harsh conditions under which he had lived. She wonders if his marriage to Cressida and the luxury of his present circumstances will prevent him from writing that type of music again. Carrie suspects that Cressida has noticed this as well.

When Cressida's company goes on tour the following spring, Bouchalka decides to stay behind in New York. While she is clearly disappointed, she tells others that he remained home to work on a composition. In the following year, he remains home most of the time, tending to Cressida's personal affairs while she tours. He has no ambition and has not done any composing for quite some time. Cressida, meanwhile, continues to tour reluctantly, and it is clear that her enthusiasm has waned. The couple drifts further and further apart.

During one of Cressida's touring engagements, she is stricken with an overwhelming desire to see her husband; rather than continuing on with the rest of the ensemble, she decides to take the train to New York, where she will spend one night before joining the group in Chicago. She realizes that she is taking a big risk by doing this, since if the train is delayed she will miss the performance; so strong is her desire, though, that she decides to do it anyway. When she arrives home, she is horrified to discover Bouchalka with Ruzenka, the cook. He attempts to explain his actions by saying that he was quite drunk, that the affair was meaningless, and that nothing like that had ever happened before. Cressida is unmoved and when she returns from her concert tour, she checks into a hotel. The divorce follows quickly thereafter.

When Carrie meets with Bouchalka a short time later, he attempts to justify his actions, saying that he would have forgiven a similar transgression by Cressida. He tells Carrie that although he comes from a completely different world than Cressida, he believes that he understands her far better than anyone else in her life. He also says he believes that luck led him to Cressida and that for that reason, he does not belong with her. He says that for his part, he has, with the exception of this one dalliance, been entirely faithful and had never so much as kissed the cheek of another woman. Even so, based on his one mistake, he finds his marriage has ended. As he talks, Carrie sees that all of the misery he had endured during his life prior to Cressida has come rushing back and seems to be overwhelming him once more. Bouchalka bids Carrie farewell and leaves. She never sees or hears from him again.

# Part 3 Analysis

The majority of this section chronicles Cressida's meeting and eventual marriage to Bouchalka. While the Bohemian musician-composer may not seem a compatible partner for Cressida - recall that she is rather put off by his appearance and refers to him as "poor" - he has one very important characteristic: he is able to show his appreciation to Cressida for everything she does for him. In this respect, he is significantly different from virtually everyone else in her life; her siblings have come to expect that she will support them and their business ventures, and her son also feels a strong sense of entitlement. In many ways, in fact, Bouchalka reminds us of Cressida's deceased first husband, Charley Wilton. Both men were musicians fiercely dedicated to their craft. Even the physical characteristics possessed by the men appear to be similar; Charley is described as pale and ethereal while Bouchalka is described as gaunt, with a "luminous pallor." Indeed, while Bouchalka seems to spend a great deal of time with Cressida early on, it isn't until she learns that he is gravely ill that she decides she is falling in love with him. While this fact alone isn't terribly significant, when we remember that Cressida spent a good portion of her brief first marriage caring for her terminally ill husband, we begin to see more of a connection. Given these similarities, it is hardly surprising that Bouchalka is the man that Cressida chooses to be her third husband.

It is interesting and not at all coincidental that Cressida tells Carrie that given the chance, she would marry Charley all over again even if she knew that the outcome would be the same. This statement gives us an idea as to the depth of the love Cressida had for her first husband and also reveals her belief that she is not likely to find that sort of love again. Her realization that her marriage to Charley represents one of the only times in her life where she could say she was truly happy tells us that despite her fame, Cressida is overwhelmingly unhappy.

When she meets Bouchalka, Cressida seems to become re-energized. In him she sees hunger and the desire to succeed. Recall the first Sunday afternoon he spends at Cressida's home; as he and Carrie talk, she notices how comfortable he seems; when the conversation turns to his music, however, he becomes agitated and nervous. It is almost as though his music is an extension of his being and the fact that his music has not been accepted in the United States is, in his opinion, a direct reflection of his lack of worthiness. As his work begins to gain acceptance, however, he becomes far more confident and outgoing.

The steps that Cressida takes before marrying Bouchalka are also somewhat interesting. The fact that she finds it necessary to invest in her brothers' business, send her son to school, and give Poppas a raise before marrying Bouchalka tells us that despite her belief that he is her soul mate, she nonetheless still feels the need to placate the other people who have significant roles in her life. While these acts are illustrative of Cressida's generosity, they also show that she feels a tremendous obligation toward her family and Poppas.

It becomes clear fairly early on that, like Cressida's earlier marriages, her marriage to Bouchalka will not last. While there is nothing in the demeanor of either Cressida or Bouchalka to suggest that there is trouble brewing, the author provides small hints. First, we learn that when the couple returns from their honeymoon, Bouchalka spends most of his time wandering around the house, admiring his possessions rather than working. He is also described as having become "less gaunt," which implies that his inactivity has caused him to put on some weight. Given the fact that Cressida seemed to be most attracted to his drive and ambition, we imagine that it will only be a matter of time before she loses patience with Bouchalka. Even so, the couple seems to be happy, and Carrie describes the regular Sunday afternoon gatherings at their home as being most pleasant.

It is interesting to note that, in contrast to her prior marriage, as Bouchalka gains a more prominent role in Cressida's life, Poppas' role seems to diminish. While he is most certainly still in the picture, he seems to have been relegated to a sort of secondary status; that is to say that Cressida now seeks the opinion of Bouchalka on matters for which she previously would have consulted Poppas. This is Cressida's decision and does not seem to have been influenced by Bouchalka in any way.

Further indication that this marriage is headed toward trouble comes when we learn that Bouchalka is becoming increasingly reluctant to leave home, even staying behind when Cressida goes on tour. While it is clear that Cressida would rather have her husband with her, she allows him to remain at home and attend to her personal affairs. The fact that he has done virtually no composing tells us that he has become quite complacent and content with his current lifestyle and no longer sees the need to work. This loss of ambition is not lost on Cressida, who becomes increasingly disenchanted with her husband.

There is another hint that something is amiss during this period when Bouchalka describes to Carrie the feeling of never having to worry about being cold. In the course of their conversation he mentions that often when he awakens at night, he sees that "her door is open, and [turns on his] light," a statement which suggests that the couple does not share the same bedroom.

Finally, there is a sense of irony in this section that should be mentioned. As Bouchalka finds himself lamenting the indiscretion that led to the end of his marriage, he tells Carrie that he knows it was luck that brought him to Cressida, and, that given his belief that he was born an unlucky man, there was virtually no chance that their relationship would last. The fact that Bouchalka considers Cressida lucky is interesting because given what we know of her past, she seems to have had her share of trouble and bad luck. It could be, then, that Bouchalka really knows very little about his wife's past; if this is the case, it suggests that he entered the marriage not out of love, but out of a sense of obligation to Cressida for all she had done for him. Similarly, it could be said that he entered into the marriage because he knew that by doing so, he could be assured food, shelter, and all the material comforts he could wish for.

# Part 4

## Part 4 Summary

Cressida's fourth husband, Jerome Brown, proves to be the worst of all. He is a financier who requires heavy financial support. Cressida soon tires of this and attempts to convince him to move abroad so that perhaps his interest can be diverted from these expensive failures; he will not agree to this, however, and eventually, things get so bad that Cressida is forced to take a mortgage on her home. When confiding this to Carrie, she tells her that as much as she has tried to use her fortune to make others happy, money has only proven to make her life more difficult.

When a particularly risky deal goes bad, Cressida decides to return to England, where she is sure she can make enough money to help Jerome overcome this latest financial setback. When it is time to return to America, she decides to book passage on the maiden voyage of the *Titanic,* feeling that the publicity would be good for her career. Poppas and Horace had been sent home the previous week, and so she was traveling alone. Cressida Garnet was not among the survivors of that infamous disaster.

A few days later, Carrie went to the White Star offices to see if there was any word regarding Cressida's fate. While there, she saw Jerome, Horace, Poppas, and Buchanan Garnet, one of Cressida's brothers, also there awaiting any word. Carrie notes that each of them has aged and that they all look extraordinarily sad. When it becomes clear that Cressida is not among the survivors, they leave.

Carrie, along with Henry Gilbert, an old friend of Cressida's, are named executors of her estate. Carrie is surprised to learn that most of her friend's fortune had been converted to stocks that are now worthless. Poppas had been left a bequest of fifty thousand dollars, which Cressida's family and Jerome contested. In an effort to make their case, they brought to court letters from Cressida, which underscored the extent to which she tried to take care of her family's financial needs. There were also letters she had written to Jerome in which she pleaded with him to go with her to live in another country. Early on, Carrie and Henry decide to take Poppas' side, and together, they ensure that he receives the money he is entitled to. Money in hand, he finally makes good on his promise to retire to Asia.

Meanwhile, the rest of Cressida's relatives argue over every possession in her home. Carrie often finds herself amused at their antics and shares the stories in her letters with Poppas. In his most recent reply, he had enclosed a photograph of himself on a camel under which is the phrase:

"Traulich und Treu ist's nur in der Tiefe: falsch und feig ist was dort oben sich freut!"

Reading Poppas' letter makes Carrie feel somewhat nostalgic, and she ends her narrative by explaining that this is what has prompted her to recount this story.

# Part 4 Analysis

The final part of the story takes place after Cressida's marriage to Jerome Brown. As had been the case with Bouchalka, Jerome's motives for marrying Cressida were primarily borne of his need for financial support. Apparently, Jerome's financial needs are quite significant, and eventually Cressida is forced to mortgage her home to help pay his debts. Even so, despite the fact that she is getting older, Cressida once again goes abroad to perform in the hope that she will be able to make enough money to satisfy those debts

Cressida's tragic death aboard the *Titanic* is symbolic of her inability to financially keep her head above water. With her fourth marriage, she finds herself drowning in debt, and in addition to performing abroad, she makes the fateful decision to book passage on the *Titanic* in the hopes that the ensuing publicity will help rejuvenate her career. Ironically, because of her dire financial position, she is forced to book a cabin in the lower portion of the ship, which virtually ensured that she would not survive. This is also symbolic of how far she has fallen both professionally and emotionally.

While Carrie's description of the events that follow the reading of Cressida's will is somewhat amusing, it also underscores the extent to which her siblings viewed Cressida as their provider rather than as their sister. The inscription Poppas makes on the photograph he sends to Carrie alludes to this and sums up the one lesson Cressida did not manage to learn during her time on this earth:

"Traulich und Treu ist's nur in der Tiefe: falsch und feig ist was dort oben sich freut!"

This translates to: "Loyalty, or comfort, and truth are found only in the depth." This simple statement seems to sum up Cressida's life, and tragic death, quite well. The inscription on Poppas' photograph brings to mind the fact that Bouchalka really did not know much about Cressida beyond her public persona.

Indeed, the only people who could be described as being truly loyal to Cressida are Poppas and Carrie. The fact that neither of them relied on Cressida for large sums of money underscores the notion that true friendships transcend monetary wealth.

# Characters

## Blasius Bouchalka

Blasius Bouchalka is Cressida's third husband, who cheats on her with Cressida's chef, Ruzenka. A poor Bohemian musician, Cressida is drawn to his wildness when she first sees him in a restaurant leading an orchestra. Bouchalka grew up in a monastery in Bohemia and has been poor for most of his life, eking out a living with his music wherever he can. He has only been in New York for a year when he meets Cressida, with whom he becomes enamored. For her part, Cressida is also interested and helps to nurse him when he is sick. She supports him financially and professionally when he is well.

After Bouchalka and Cressida get married, he starts to become complacent and loses the wildness that drew Cressida to him. He prefers to sit in Cressida's house, eating all of the luscious Bohemian creations that Ruzenka whips up for him. As a result, he starts to put on weight and loses his motivation to publish his music. In addition, he does not like to travel so Cressida ends up going on most of her tours alone. In the middle of one tour, however, she makes a surprise visit home to see Bouchalka, where she finds him drunk and in bed with Ruzenka. Cressida files for divorce shortly thereafter, although she does provide Bouchalka with a settlement to help him survive. Bouchalka comes to see Carrie, and tells her that it was only a matter of time because he was born to be miserable. After the divorce is final, he leaves to go home to his native Bohemia.

## Jerome Brown

Jerome Brown is Cressida Garnet's fourth and final husband, and the one who ages her the most. At the beginning of the story, Cressida is about to marry Brown, who she says has always been there for support, and who has never asked her for anything. This aspect changes after they are married. Brown, a financier, proceeds to make several bad investments and drains the Garnet fortune. It is because of this that Cressida schedules the fateful money-raising tour in England, where she dies on returning when her ship, the *Titanic*, sinks. Jerome joins the Garnets in contesting Cressida's will and squabbles over her possessions.

## Caroline

Caroline is the narrator, and one of Cressida's few trusted friends. Caroline, or "Carrie," as Cressida refers to her, tells Cressida's story mostly through flashback, starting with a voyage just before Cressida's marriage to Jerome Brown, then discussing all of the singer's past husbands, and finally coming back to the marriage to Brown. Caroline is distraught to hear about the marriage to Brown, since she has seen how Cressida's family and even some of her marriages have drained the singer of financial and

emotional resources. Caroline met Cressida when they were kids in school in their native Columbus, Ohio. Cressida's first husband, Charley Wilton, was Caroline's cousin.

Caroline is one of the few people who tries to warn Cressida about the draining effect that her family is having on the singer. She speculates in her narration that some of the family are so envious of Cressida that they would rejoice over her death and notes that the only person who supports her various marriages is Cressida's son, Horace, whose affections can be easily bought. During the story, Caroline is the one who is most often with Cressida on her days when she is not singing. Caroline is present at a number of the important events in Cressida's life, such as when she meets Blasius Bouchalka. The Garnet family is not all that fond of Caroline and are even less fond of her when she is appointed as one of the co-executors of Cressida's will and defeats the family's challenge to it.

## Carrie

*See* Caroline

## Cressy

*See* Cressida Garnet

## Cressida Garnet

Cressida Garnet is a famous concert singer— known for her seemingly inexhaustible energy and professionalism—who spends her entire life providing for others and eventually dies on the *Titanic*. As a girl in Columbus, Ohio, she befriends Caroline, who narrates Cressida's story and who is one of Cressida's only friends. Caroline tries to warn Cressida about her destructively needy family.

Cressida's first husband, Charley Wilton, is a frail but passionate organist who is also Caroline's cousin. Wilton dies from tuberculosis after they are married a year, but not before he and Cressida have a son, Horace. None of Cressida's other three marriages, which compose the bulk of Caroline's tale, brings her much more comfort. Her second husband, Ransome McChord, cannot tolerate Cressida's close friendship with Miletus Poppas, her accompanist and confidant, and so Cressida is forced to choose between them. She chooses Poppas, who has also helped to make Cressida into the star she is. Of course, with the huge fees that she pays Poppas, it has been a mutually beneficial relationship.

Cressida's third marriage, to Blasius Bouchalka, a poor Bohemian musician, starts out well. He is a passionate artist, and she is drawn to his wildness. However, after he realizes he does not have to fight for his food anymore, he becomes complacent and stops creating, choosing instead to sit and eat the food of the Bohemian chef, Ruzenka. After Cressida finds the two in bed, both are sent away.

Cressida's final marriage, to a financier named Jerome Brown, is the most draining. He gambles away most of her fortune on bad investments, which also drains her emotionally. Although she has never worried about money in the past, she does now, and decides to stage a special money-raising tour in England. However, she chooses to return to the United States on the maiden voyage of the *Titanic*, and does not survive when the ship sinks. After she is dead, Brown and her family fight over her inheritance and try to block her wish to give Poppas a third of her remaining fortune. With the help of Henry Gilbert, another of Cressida's childhood friends, Caroline is able to defeat this challenge.

## Miss Georgie Garnet

Miss Georgie Garnet is one of Cressida's two sisters, who is aggressive and intrusive; when Cressida dies, she and Julia fight over Cressida's jewels and gowns.

## Horace Garnet

Horace Garnet is Cressida's only son, from her first marriage to Charley Wilton. Horace is twenty-two, bored, and like all the Garnets, envies his mother's seemingly inexhaustible energy. As Caroline notes, Horace's affections can be bought, and as such, he is the only one who supports her last marriage to Jerome Brown. However, he is one of the many Garnets who fights over Cressida's possessions after she is dead.

## Miss Julia Garnet

Miss Julia Garnet is one of Cressida's two sisters, who does not appreciate the wealth that "Cressy" provides the family; when Cressida dies, she and Julia fight over Cressida's jewels and gowns.

## Henry Gilbert

Henry Gilbert is Cressida's lawyer and a trusted friend from her youth who acts as co-executor of Cressida's will, along with Caroline. He successfully fights Jerome Brown and the Garnets when they contest the will.

## Ransome McChord

Ransome McChord is Cressida's second husband, a wealthy businessman who does not approve of her close friendship with Poppas; when he forces Cressida to make a choice, she chooses Poppas

## Miletus Poppas

Miletus Poppas is the Greek accompanist and right-hand man of Cressida Garnet. He has helped transform Cressida into an accomplished artist and, as such, is frequently by her side. This intimate relationship makes Cressida's second husband, Ransome McChord, jealous, and he forces Cressida to choose between them. She chooses Poppas, who is her confidant in both professional and personal matters. Poppas becomes rich from the retaining fee and percentage of Cressida's salary that he receives.

This arrangement is a constant concern to the other Garnets, who feel that Poppas is cutting into their money. They also use the fact that Poppas caused the break between McChord and Cressida as a manipulative tool, saying that it has put a stain on the family's reputation. Still, as much as they dislike the man, they realize that he is an asset to Cressida's career, and as such have made an uneasy peace with him. Poppas suffers from a facial neuralgia, a type of nervous disorder that flares up in certain damp climates, and he talks in the beginning of the story about moving to the drier climate of Asia when he retires—which he does at the end of the story after Cressida dies.

## Ruzenka

Ruzenka, whose name means "little Rose," is Cressida's Bohemian chef, whom Cressida catches sleeping with her husband, Blasius Bouchalka; Ruzenka is sent away the next morning.

## Charley Wilton

Charley Wilton was Cressida's first music teacher in Columbus, Ohio, her first husband, and the father of Horace. Wilton, who has studied music abroad, is a passionate organist with a weak constitution, which manifests itself in his fatal case of tuberculosis. Out of all of Cressida's husbands, she loved him the most, but they were only married for a year before he died.

# Themes

## High Art

In many of her works, Cather explored what it meant to be an artist in the twentieth century. In works like "The Diamond Mine," Cather expresses one of her main views, that "high art," art that is done for the art's sake and not for money or fame, was the only type of art that could lead to a happy success. Throughout this story, the author plays with that idea. Cressida Garnet is a rich and famous artist, but she is also miserable. At the beginning of the story, she has "just announced her intention of marrying a fourth time," since none of her previous marriages have worked out. Cressida is not meant to find love that lasts, because when it comes down to it, most of her relationships are with people who do not love her; they love the idea of her fame or money, or they love having access to these resources.

Her last marriage gives Cressida "the worst" of her husbands. Jerome Brown, a financier who uses Cressida's money to make a number of bad investments and forces the opera singer to grow "rapidly older." In the end, this marriage is fatal, as Cressida tries to fix her husband's financial woes by doing a special concert. Cather places Cressida on the *Titanic*, where she is one of the many casualties. "She had been ill," says the narrator, and when the ship went down she apparently "never left her cabin." The strain of trying to pursue a career as a world-renowned opera singer has been increased by the extra strain that her husband puts on Cressida's finances and vitality. In the end, Cather suggests that an artist must pursue art for its own sake, or else face a potentially tragic end.

## Vitality

Until the strain of trying to undo Jerome Brown's mistakes saps her strength, Cressida is known as somebody with "a seemingly exhaustless vitality," which, along with her "certain 'squareness' of character as well as of mind," gives her higher than normal earning powers. As the narrator notes, it is Cressida's vitality that gives her the strength to be the ultimate professional, and which has led to her success. "Managers chose her over the heads of singers much more gifted, because she was so sane, so conscientious, and above all, because she was so sure."

Her vitality is something that no other members of her family have. When Cressida is talking with her son, Horace, "about his losses at bridge," and "begging him to keep away from the cardroom," he responds by letting her know that he is bored and there is nothing else to do. Cressida, who has so much vitality that she is never bored, tries to motivate her son: "If I were twenty-two, and a boy, with some one to back me—" Her son does not want to hear it, however, because, as he tells her, "Oh, I've not your energy, Mother dear. We make no secret of that." The "we" refers to Cressida's family, which is one of the biggest drains on her vitality.

# Family Relations

Cressida's success has not come easily, even though she does have a lot of spirit. "Everything but her driving power Cressida had to get from the outside," says the narrator, when describing how the singer started her career. She has had to work hard to make it in a tough industry, and she has received very little support from her family in the process. In fact, all of the family members expect Cressida to support them. As Cressida notes, they "feel that I carried off the family success, just as I might have carried off the family silver." Because of this view, the whole family depends on Cressida. In fact, when the narrator first introduces two of Cressida's family members, she calls them "two of the factors in Cressida's destiny."

The family depends on Cressida for both money and vitality. For the money, the family is constantly requesting that Cressida send them funds. As a result, she has to devote some of her energies to sending letters addressing these requests. As the narrator notes, "Such letters they were! The writing of a tired, over-driven woman; promising money, sending money herewith, asking for an acknowledgment of the draft sent last month, etc." The family bombards her with these requests because, as the narrator notes after Cressida's death, "It never seemed to occur to them that this golden stream, whether it rushed or whether it trickled, came out of the industry, out of the mortal body of a woman."

The family is also dependent upon Cressida for their own vitality. "They were waiting, in constrained immobility, for Cressida to descend and reanimate them,—will them to do or to be something," says the narrator, of some of the family members on the ship. The narrator tries to get Cressida to see that her family is a drain, at one point, citing that Cressida's depression on one voyage might be from her sister, Julia, instead of the "sea air," as Cressida assumes. To this, Cressida responds, "But it was Julia's turn. I can't come alone, and they've grown to expect it. They haven't, either of them, much else to expect."

And yet, even though the family has come to depend upon Cressida as a lifeline for both money and energy, they also hate Cressida for having the qualities and success they do not, and may secretly wish for her downfall. As the narrator notes, "If they could have their will, what would they do with the generous, credulous creature who nourished them, I wondered? How deep a humiliation would each egotism exact?" The narrator notes that they would not try to harm her physically, but that if they were somehow giving access to "the fire at which she warmed herself . . . which kept her going" they would most likely stamp it out, "with the whole Garnet pack behind them to make extinction sure."

# Style

## Metaphor

When a reader picks up Cather's story, he or she might expect that it is about an actual diamond mine. However, as the narrator illustrates, the title is a metaphor, a figure of speech that is used to represent something else. This metaphor is explained a few paragraphs into the story, when the narrator overhears someone say of the opera singer, "That woman's a diamond mine." The narrator, who is "an old friend of Cressida Garnet," is "sorry to hear that mining operations were to be begun again." When the narrator says this, she further explains what the metaphor means, illustrating that in the mind of the public and Cressida's own family, the opera singer is not a woman. Instead, she is an object, which can and will be "mined," stripping away Cressida's energy, money, and ultimately her life itself. This is not the only metaphor used to describe the opera singer. When the narrator is talking about Poppas, she says that he was the only one of the group "who understood the sources of her fortune," a fact that Cressida's family knows, so consequently, he is the only one who is able "to proclaim sanctuary for the goose that laid the golden eggs."

## Flashback

"The Diamond Mine" is a little confusing, because it does not follow a straight chronological pattern. The story starts out on a ship, when the narrator notes, "I first became aware that Cressida Garnet was on board when I saw young men with cameras going up to the boat deck." This opening immediately gives the setting of the story, or so the reader believes. But after the first paragraph, the narrator jumps back to "a few days before, when I was lunching with some friends at Sherry's." The narrator refers to this lunch so that she can get the "diamond mine" reference in there that she has overheard, but then she wanders in her thoughts about Jerome Brown. In the next paragraph, she says, "I had been away from New York and had not seen Cressida for a year; now I paused on the gangplank." The "now" and "gangplank" put the action back on the boat, but the style that the narrator has used thus far, jumping back and forth in time within a few paragraphs, mimics the pattern she uses to narrate the rest of the tale.

However, as the narrator gets into the main portion of the story, when she is talking about each of Cressida's husbands in turn, the tale takes on a roughly chronological pattern. Even so, the jumpiness that the narrator uses in the beginning part of the tale has served an important function—it helps to underscore for the reader the manic pace of Cressida's life in the high-pressured and high-profile world of opera music. If the narrator were to go simply from beginning to end, the story would not have as much narrative tension. Also, disorienting the reader a little in the beginning helps to hide the surprise at the end of the story, when Cressida goes down on the *Titanic.*

At this point, the narrator has been discussing Cressida's fourth husband, Jerome Brown, and how his bad business deals have forced Cressida to do a special concert in England, "where she could always raise money from a faithful public." As the narrator continues, the reader does not suspect what is about to happen because the story is still roughly chronological, and the reader has gotten used to the pattern by now. The next line, however, catapults the story into the future: "When she sailed, her friends knew that her husband's affairs were in a bad way; but we did not know how bad until after Cressida's death." One minute, Cressida is preparing for her journey, then suddenly, the narrative is looking back "after her death." The next line clarifies what happened. "Cressida Garnet, as all the world knows, was lost on the *Titanic.*" The narrator once again springs a time change on the reader, but this time, it is the ultimate payoff.

## Foreshadowing

When an author employs a fluid framework for a story, in which the narrative frequently jumps around in time, passages that foreshadow or hint at the future are often not noticed by the reader's consciousness. For example, in the first part of the story, the narrator is talking to Cressida on a ship, but as she talks to her, the narrator gives a lot of background detail for the reader, going back in time to talk about other events, when necessary.

After the narrator has finished telling the reader about Cressida's first marriage and giving background on Poppas and his role in the singer's career, the narrator brings the action back to the present, when she says, "It was of Bouchalka that we talked upon that last voyage I ever made with Cressida Garnet, and not of Jerome Brown." The story has started off on the ship, discussing the upcoming marriage to Jerome Brown. Now, as the two women talk, the narrator lets the reader know that she is about to jump into the past again to talk about Blasius Bouchalka, Cressida's third and most recent husband. However, the narrator also slips in the phrase "last voyage." These two words have a very ominous sound to them, and indeed, they do foreshadow the fact that Cressida is going to die. But this message gets buried somewhat, when the narrator suddenly starts talking about Cressida's marriage to Bouchalka.

# Historical Context

## Music in the Early Twentieth Century

In the first decade of the twentieth century in the United States, music was an expanding industry. Popular music came in many different forms, including ballads, ragtime, the blues, and show tunes, and Americans from all walks of life experienced it. Companies producing sheet music, instruments, phonographs, and other types of musical accessories found a huge demand for their products. Classical music was also finding an audience with Americans, due to the increasing number of symphony orchestras nationwide and the growth of the recording industry. At the same time, popular singers, like Lillian Nordica, were becoming international stars as a result of their performances.

## Lillian Nordica

As James Woodress noted in *Willa Cather: A Literary Life*, "The Diamond Mine" "is based on the life of Lillian Nordica, whose last husband, George Young, is very thinly disguised in the story as the unscrupulous, mercenary character Jerome Brown." Everybody knew this fact, and Young threatened to sue, but "never followed through," as Woodress noted. Like Cressida Garnet in the story, Lillian Nordica, was known both for her strong voice and her engaging performances. Nordica studied at the New England Conservatory of Music and also in Milan. Nordica spent an extended time—from 1895 to 1909—singing at the Metropolitan Opera, just as Cressida spent several years there. The Metropolitan Opera Association was the leading opera company in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, during the company's "Golden Age." While Nordica died after her 1913 farewell tour, from complications of pneumonia, in the story, Cressida dies when the *Titanic* goes down in 1912.

## Titanic

The largest ship of its time, the *Titanic* was 882.5 feet long and 92.5 feet wide with a total carrying capacity of 46,329 tons. The *Titanic's* maiden voyage departed from England on April 10, 1912, and was scheduled to arrive in New York. Cather's choice to place Cressida on the *Titanic* is historically believable, since many famous and prominent people from Europe, Britain, and the United States were on board for the maiden voyage.

Just a few minutes before midnight on April 14, the ship struck a partially submerged iceberg in the North Atlantic waters. Immediately after the incident, the *Titanic* began broadcasting distress signals. After a short period of time, crewmen of the ship also begin firing rockets in hopes of attracting the attention of any nearby ships for assistance. However, the closest ship, the *Californian*, did not receive the distress signals. The next closest ship, the *Carpathia*, did catch *Titanic's* distress signal but was

fifty-six miles away. It took over three hours for the ship to reach the Titanic and give assistance. By the time the *Carpathia* reached the sinking ship, it had become too late for many. Around 1,500, of the more than 2,000 passengers and ship personnel, died. Due to the hype of the ship itself, its maiden voyage, and the notable passengers on board, the disaster received worldwide attention, and remains one of the most famous disasters in the twentieth century.

# Critical Overview

Cather's story, "The Diamond Mine," almost did not see publication. In his book, *Willa Cather: A Literary Life*, published in 1987, James Woodress noted that the author's agent "had a little trouble selling it." H. L. Mencken, one of the influential figures in American letters at the time, had considered the story for publication in his collection, *The Smart Set*, but "he was afraid that the story, which is based on the career of Lillian Nordica, American soprano, would open him to a libel suit," Woodress said. Other publishers had the same concern. The story was eventually published in *McClure's* magazine in 1916, where, Woodress noted, it was "her last appearance in the magazine she once had edited."

However, many critics did not review the story until 1920 when it was reprinted in Cather's story collection, *Youth and the Bright Medusa*. At this point, reviewers generally favored the collection, starting with Mencken himself, who said that "one finds in every line of her writing a sure-footed and civilized culture; it gives her an odd air of foreignness, particularly when she discusses music, which is often." The overwhelming majority of critics have followed Mencken's lead in discussing the artistic theme of the story. In the same year, Blanche Colton Williams noted that "the tales are the work of an artist sensitive to the rhythm of prose; significantly . . . they are about musicians."

The *New York Times Book Review* noted of "The Diamond Mine" specifically, that with her "word portraits," Cather has the ability to "bottle up in a paragraph the essence of a character." In fact, one of the few negative reviews from 1920 was that of Orlo Williams, who reviewed *Youth and the Bright Medusa in Athenaeum*, and noted that "her longest story, 'The Diamond Mine,' is a truly fine idea, but quite inadequately carried out." Orlo Williams was not the only one who commented on the story's length. Blanche Colton Williams called the story, "a condensed novel."

In the next two years, 1921 and 1922, critics continued to praise both *Youth and the Bright Medusa* and "The Diamond Mine." Sinclair Lewis called the collection a "golden book," while Francis Hackett of the *New Republic* noted how, in the story, "the ironies of the artistic temperament are scrutinized . . . in Blasius Bouchelka, Cressida's wild-eyed husband who becomes tame and fat in prosperity." Dorothy Canfield Fisher, in the *Yale Review*, focused on Cressida Garnet's plight of being the successful sister who is envied and hated by the family, and noted that this was a relatively new topic, "since the woman successful and prosperous by her own efforts is rather new to the world." She also remarked that this subject is "full of pathos" and that the story "is deeply pathetic from the beginning to the end."

Since the 1920s, both the collection and the short story have stood the test of time, with mainly positive reviews. However, in 1951, in his *The Modern Novel in America, 1900-1950*, Frederick J. Hoffman stated that the story collection "has cost Miss Cather too much effort to summon her people from the void," and that "they appear less like human beings . . . than like pale unfeatured silhouettes." This is by far the minority viewpoint, since most critics in the last half of the twentieth century loved the collection and the

short story. In her 1970 essay, "Reflections on Willa Cather," Katherine Ann Porter noted that both of Cather's short story collections "live still with morning freshness in my memory," while Woodress called it "an excellent work."

The art theme is still present in modern criticism about both the book and the story. As R. M. Robertson noted in 1990 in his essay in *Criticism*, "This book, like all her books, comes out in favor of high Art as the best means of countering the moneygrubbing and the pointless taylorism that rules the modern world Willa Cather saw." In 2000, Janis P. Stout, in her book, *Willa Cather: The Writer and Her World*, discussed the "woman artist's relation to her family and the emotionally draining nature of her work." Stout considered "the bitterness with which the issue is presented" in the story, and wondered "to what extent [Cather] felt herself estranged from or even used by her own family." Stout also noted Cressida's hard work and determination in "The Diamond Mine," and said that "it is a powerful statement of what is entailed by a sense of artistic vocation."

# Criticism

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

*Poquette has a bachelor's degree in English and specializes in writing about literature. In the following essay, Poquette discusses Cressida Garnet's inability to have a successful marriage in Cather's story.*

In his 1990 essay, "Disinterring the 'Scandal' of Willa Cather: *Youth and the Bright Medusa*," in *Criticism*, R. M. Robertson noted that Cather's short story collection, "like all her books, comes out in favor of high Art as the best means of countering the money-grubbing . . . that rules the modern world Willa Cather saw." To Cather, art should be practiced for art's sake alone, not for money or fame. In stories where the author did depict rich and successful artists, events rarely turn out well.

In the case of "The Diamond Mine," Cressida Garnet, a successful opera singer, dies on the *Titanic*. Up until her death, Cressida's life is not much more rosy. Her family is totally dependent upon her for both money and vitality. The situation is not much better in Cressida's many marriages, where her status as a successful artist, and the sacrifices she must make to maintain this status, get in the way of her attempts to have a happy marriage. In the end, it is Cressida's attempts to pursue both marriage and art that lead to her ill-fated demise in "The Diamond Mine."

Cressida Garnet has some real bad luck when it comes to her marriages. Her first marriage, to Charley Wilton, ends badly when he dies from tuberculosis. Sadly, the "one beautifully happy year" they had together before he died is one of the only happy years she had in any of her four marriages. As James Woodress noted of Cather's fiction in 1987 in his *Willa Cather: A Literary Life*, "happy marriages in her fiction are rare." In the particular case of "The Diamond Mine," Woodress says the author makes it clear that "marriage and art do not mix." This is a fact that Cressida unfortunately never learns. In fact, she fails to realize that the reason she was happy with Charley Wilton during their year of marriage was because she had yet to achieve her success as an artist. When Cressida remembers their year together and says how happy she was, she qualifies it by saying, "though we were poor." She believes that she was happy with Charley in spite of being poor, but as her later marriages show, she was happy because of being poor—and because she was not a successful artist.

Cressida's second marriage is to Ransome McChord, "the foreign representative of the great McChord Harvester Company." Not much is mentioned about this husband, other than the fact that he "had so persistently objected to Poppas that she was eventually forced to choose between them." Cressida of course chooses Poppas, who has been her accompanist and assistant for a long time. Cressida recognizes that her current fame is "largely the work of Miletus Poppas," who had helped her to "work her problem out," when she was a fledgling, untrained singer. "Poppas was indispensable to her," says the narrator. He is the one who "knew all the simple things that were so desperately hard for Cressida," and as such is "necessary to her career." In her book, *Willa Cather: The Writer and Her World*, Janis P. Stout noted "the hard work and determination with which Cressida pursues her career," saying that "it is a powerful

statement of what is entailed by a sense of artistic vocation." This drive is so strong in Cressida that when her husband Ransome forces her to choose, she chooses Poppas, who is inextricably linked to her art.

Her third husband, Blasius Bouchalka, has no problem with Poppas. In fact, at first glance, the marriage between Bouchalka and Cressida seems a perfect match. Both are artists, and both are passionate. When Cressida and the narrator first meet Bouchalka, the narrator notes that "his manner was excited and dramatic," and that he had "wild black eyes." This vibrant artist seems to be the perfect man for Cressida, who herself has "a seemingly exhaustless vitality."

Indeed, when the two start getting to know each other, Cressida uses her influence to help Bouchalka get ahead. As the narrator says, she sang Bouchalka's music at the Metropolitan Opera, "she got him a position with the Symphony Orchestra . . . aroused the interest of a publisher in his work, and introduced him to people who were helpful to him." Bouchalka is profoundly grateful for these kindnesses, unlike Cressida's family, who do not appreciate the ways she helps them out. Says the narrator, "she had always liked to make people happy, and he was the first one who had accepted her bounty without sourness."

The association with Bouchalka eventually leads to marriage. "She was married in June and sailed immediately with her husband," says the narrator, also noting that "Poppas was to join them in Vienna in August, when she would begin to work again." This is an unusually large break for Cressida, who is so committed to her art and has such a good work ethic that she often has jobs lined up year-round, and is sometimes "on the road for several weeks" before she can come home. It is this professionalism that has given her such a good reputation in her field. "Managers chose her over the heads of singers much more gifted, because she was so sane, so conscientious, and above all, because she was so sure," says the narrator.

At first glance, the honeymoon appears to do Cressida some good because when they return, she seems to have found a happy medium. "She attacked her work at once with more vigor and more ease; did not drive herself so relentlessly." However, the relationship between Cressida and Bouchalka starts to sour almost immediately. He has been a starving artist his whole life, and when he marries into Cressida's money and comfort, his passion to create is dimmed. Unlike Cressida, who has the strong drive to perform her art even though she is already rich and does not need to, Bouchalka is no longer interested. "During the second winter people began to say that Bouchalka was becoming too thoroughly domesticated," says the narrator.

As Francis Hackett of the *New Republic* noted in 1921 in this story, "the ironies of the artistic temperament are scrutinized . . . in Blasius Bouchalka, Cressida's wild-eyed husband who becomes tame and fat in prosperity." During their third year of marriage, Bouchalka has gotten so comfortable with the rich lifestyle that he never wants to leave home, even to accompany Cressida on her many tours. Although Cressida is distressed that Bouchalka has gotten like this, and misses his "old fire," she still tries to save the marriage, and decides to surprise him one night by skipping a rehearsal so they can

spend the evening together, a decision that the narrator notes is "against her custom, one might say against her principles." Cressida's work ethic for her art is so strong that she never misses rehearsals. As the narrator notes later, when she and Cressida are thinking back to her relationship with Bouchelka, "she became almost another woman, but not quite. Her 'principles,' or his lack of them, drove those two apart in the end."

On her "surprise" visit, Cressida finds Bouchelka in bed with her cook, and ends the marriage. Bouchalka tries to appeal to Cressida, but it is no use. As the narrator says, "it was, on the whole, easier for Cressida to be firm than to be yielding, and she knew herself too well to attempt a readjustment." The same tough professionalism that remains crucial to her success as an opera singer, cannot be turned off, even if it might help save her marriage. "She had never made shabby compromises, and it was too late for her to begin," says the narrator.

Cressida's fourth and last husband, Jerome Brown, is "the worst of Cressida's husbands." Unlike McChord or Bouchalka, who asked Cressida for things she could not do—firing Poppas and going against her principles, respectively—Brown asks her for money, something that she has already been giving her whole life to other family—but it is too much. Unfortunately, "he was the most rapacious of the men with whom she had to do," and the kind of money that Brown mines from Cressida ends up depleting her fortune.

When she has to "put a mortgage on the Tenth Street house," Cressida begins to panic and out of desperation, decides to plan a "winter concert tour" in England, where "she could always raise money from a faithful public." Up until this point in her successful career, Cressida says she has "never cared about money, except to make people happy with it, and it has been the curse of my life. It has spoiled all of my relations with people."

Although she has been able to place her art first in the past, even above her marriages, the situation with Brown will not be solved by divorce alone. For the first time in a long time since Cressida first began singing, she *has* to work for the money to pay Brown's debts, and the strain of this causes Cressida to grow "rapidly older." The narrator notes that, when Cressida got on the *Titanic*, "she had been ill." When the ship goes down, the narrator hears that "apparently she never left her cabin."

Her whole life, Cressida has given preference to her art at the expense of the relationships with different husbands. Unfortunately, her attempts to pursue both a happy marriage and a career in the arts lead to her downfall. Her "seemingly exhaustless vitality" has been depleted and in the end, she goes down in her symbolic death on the *Titanic*, as Cather's lesson to others who would try to mix marriage and art.

**Source:** Ryan D. Poquette, Critical Essay on "The Diamond Mine," in *Short Stories for Students*, The Gale Group, 2002.

# Critical Essay #2

*In the following essay excerpt, Gerber offers a brief overview of "The Diamond Mine," focusing on the conflict between an artist's personal and professional lives.*

All of the four new stories collected in *Youth and the Bright Medusa* concern the problems of professional musicians—singers—and as a group they develop the theme of the artist as celebrity, the relationship to society resulting from the pressure of popular fame, and the personal cost to the artist exacted by a life devoted to pleasing one's "public." It was a theme that was gaining currency swiftly in Cather's life, as her books became ever more widely sold and openly praised, making demands on her privacy she had not wholly anticipated. It was also a major strand of the new popular culture that was making headway in American society generally, where the notion of celebrity was taking hold with a firm, powerful, and even dictatorial grip.

Two stories best serve to illustrate this strand of Cather's interest as expressed fictionally in *Youth and the Bright Medusa*. "Coming, Aphrodite!" contrasts a pair of artists, first glimpsed during the passionate heat of their youth and then observed during their middle years. Don Hedger is a painter toiling in the avant-garde who insists upon following his own star, declining to produce the same thing over and over, no matter how profitable. Eden Bower is a singer whose ambition for a musical career includes the desire to live well in a big city, to be admired by many men, and to achieve the satisfaction of her every material want. Eden urges Don to paint the types of pictures that conform to popular taste; later, after he has become financially successful, there will be time to paint pictures to please himself. "You know very well there's only one kind of success that's real," Eden says, meaning that measured by dollars.

Following a momentary blaze of romance, doomed by the differences in their characters and sense of values, these two aspirants go their separate ways, to be seen again 18 years later, when both have "succeeded." Don Hedger, the more resolute, has forced the world to recognize his "very modern" canvases; he has not compromised. Eden Bower's name blazes in electric lights above the Lexington Opera House, where she is opening— again—with the Puccini opera she does so well that she rarely dares attempt anything else. She gives the same performance always; her audience can count on *its* not being different. They get what they expect, what they want, what they pay for. While Don Hedger at 40 is "decidedly an influence" in the painting world, his name on the lips of every young person aspiring to excellence, Eden Bower has acquired a huge popular following—and a face that, Cather says, is "hard and settled, like a plaster cast."

"The Diamond Mine" defines another price the artist may be forced to pay if she responds unduly to the claims people make on her personal life. Cressida Garnet has risen to the top ranks of American opera singers after a long struggle, aided by her determination and physical vitality. All thoughts are on perfecting her art. Unlike Eden Bower, Cressida does not feel the need for possessions. But as she matures she finds herself weighted down nevertheless, not by things but by people. One day, at age 42, Cressida wakes up to the realization that her need to have people around her and close

to her has victimized her. The emotional freight she carries has been imposed by a series of rapacious husbands and a pack of bilious siblings who regard her somewhat as a natural source, a vein of ore—a "diamond mine"—open for free-wheeling exploitation. It dawns on Cressida at last: the truth that her personal relationships somehow, despite her hopes, have always involved dollars.

During the 1920s, and later, Cather, fully occupied with her succession of novels, had comparatively little time to spare for short fiction. From time to time, however, she did try her hand at the short story, and with varying degrees of success. In 1925 and 1929, Cather published two longish stories, both inspired by her years in Pittsburgh. The first, "Uncle Valentine," stems from her feeling for the young composer Ethelbert Nevin, who died at the age of 37 while she was living there, and whom she felt to be the outstanding composer of his generation. The second story, "Double Birthday," evokes memories of Judge Samuel McClung and Isabelle and the George Seibel home where Cather spent so many enjoyable Christmas holidays. Both stories are finely crafted and evocative of Pittsburgh at the turn of the century, but neither furnishes truly serious competitions for Cather's best work.

**Source:** Philip Gerber, "Cather's Shorter Fiction: 1892-1948," in *Willa Cather*, Twayne Publishers, 1995, pp. 75-87.

# Critical Essay #3

*In the following essay excerpt, Meyering explores themes "The Diamond Mine" shares with other stories by Cather, most notably "A Gold Slipper" and "Scandal."*

For her second collection of short stories, *Youth and the Bright Medusa* (Knopf, 1920), Cather reprinted four of the stories from the earlier collection *The Troll Garden:* "Paul's Case,""A Wagner Matinée,""The Sculptor's Funeral," and "A Death in the Desert." To these were added four newer works, "Coming, Aphrodite!""A Gold Slipper,"" Scandal," and "The Diamond Mine," the earliest of the four. The title of the collection suggests the theme that binds all eight stories together. As she had done for *The Troll Garden*, Cather chose a classical image for *Youth and the Bright Medusa* as a way of tying the stories together thematically. (For a complete explanation of the thematic relationship of the *Troll Garden* stories to the epigraphs Cather chose for them, see the section "Relationship to Other Cather Works" for the chapters "A Death in the Desert" and "A Wagner Matinée.") What the image has in common with the epigraphs of *The Troll Garden* is the notion of "life's incompatibility with art. . . The chief difference between the two books is that the incompatibility of life and art is not in 1920 suggested in terms of an opposition between the dangerous sophistication of the metropolis and provincial naiveté." Instead, Cather articulates the contrasts between the vibrant energy of youth and the regrets and often the pessimism of age: "Age—not necessarily old age—is a kind of petrifaction in itself even when death does not immediately supervene." The Medusa myth is also used "to explain the hypnotic attraction of the arts for youth," but instead of focusing on the legend itself—about a grotesque monster who is nevertheless also mesmerizingly beautiful—Cather concentrates on the Medusa tale in its "beginning when the Gorgon was a beautiful young woman devoted to and associated with the earth goddesses. . . In the myth itself lay expression of the conflict Cather observed in the post-war society. The matriarchy had fallen to a masculine possessor, and the demise of beauty was imminent." Thus, all the stories in the collection are related in that they illustrate this view in one way or another. According to Ryder, "The Diamond Mine" is particularly close to "Scandal" and "A Gold Slipper" because in all three stories Cather places a male enemy in a woman's way.

Arnold explains the title of the collection as an expression of the conviction that "anyone who looked upon the Medusa, the Gorgon, would be turned to stone. Anyone who pursues art will become its captive." Woodress maintains much the same thing, but Stouck believes that by Medusa Cather means only commercial success. Sometimes the artist is victorious, but at other times, he or she is "at the Medusa's mercy, a victim of the financial bonanza that success brings."

Giannone recognizes the correspondences between the four stories reprinted from *The Troll Garden* and the other four in *Youth and the Bright Medusa*, which were published after *The Song of the Lark:* "In both groups the artist confronts possible misunderstanding by the public, exploitation in personal affairs, professional failure, and the inevitability of death. The stories from *The Troll Garden* stress defeat or death." To some extent the newer stories contain the same element of pessimism, but the agony is

somewhat relieved by "the artists' resignation to pain and impermanence. The earlier stories vent outrage and bitterness; the later ones express courage, assurance, and forgiveness" (1968, 100). Brown says that in "The Diamond Mine,""A Gold Slipper," and "Scandal," Cather shifted the focus from "the greatness, growth, or decline of a talent" to "the kind of relationships artists have with those who are not artists but are brought into contact with them."

Arnold groups the story with others in which Cather depicts a talented woman who sacrifices everything for her art. Such a woman was first portrayed in "Nanette: An Aside," but she reappears in "A Gold Slipper,""Scandal,""Coming, Aphrodite!," and *The Song of the Lark* (1984, 106). Cather's view that marriage and art are utterly incompatible is also evident here, as it is in many other works—"Nanette: An Aside,""A Singer's Romance," and even "Paul's Case," where "the actresses whom Paul admired . . . were typically supporting shiftless husbands." Woodress's interpretation is similar: sometimes the heroine does not marry, but usually she does, and she suffers for it. Cather's opinion on this subject was so strong that in one of her short stories, "Uncle Valentine," she borrows details from the marriage of her musician friend Ethelbert Nevin —a perfectly happy union— and turns it into a destructive and sad fictional one. (For a discussion of Cather's friendship with Nevin, see the "Circumstances of Composition, Sources, and Influences" section for the chapter "'A Death in the Desert.'")

"The Diamond Mine" shares a few more minor elements with other stories as well. For example, like "Scandal" it contains a portrait of a Jew that, in Robinson's opinion, "can only be described as an outburst of anti-Semitism." Field says that both "The Diamond Mine" and "The Sculptor's Funeral" "strike the note of the tragic humor in the Every Day." Bloom and Bloom see similarities between this story and "The Sculptor's Funeral" in the isolation endured by the fictional artists.

# Critical Essay #4

This story is seen by some critics as an indication of Cather's maturing views of the artist in society. Brown notes that in "The Sculptor's Funeral" (1905), Cather made clear her opinion that if an artist's friends and family failed or refused to understand him or her, the result was catastrophic to the artist, but by the time she published "The Diamond Mine" eleven years later, Cather had come to realize her mistake. Having watched artists of many kinds, she came to see that the artist was not as fragile as she had thought: genuine artistic talent survives even when powerful forces are arrayed against it. Thus, although Cather's "tone is ironical and melancholy, [it is] not in the least cynical," and the absence of cynicism may be the result of Cather's having outgrown her need to compare the artist's life with the nonartist's life.

Ryder would not agree that Cather's view of the artist became optimistic. On the contrary, by 1920 "Cather had come to believe that even the most resolute women of artistic sensibilities would find their dreams thwarted by a mercantile, masculine society." Although they were attracted by the "allure of beauty" as much as the female artists before them were, "the pursuit of the ideal" would transform them into Gorgons, and they would "lose an essential humanity in their efforts to repulse new Poseidons, new possessors of mother earth."

The character of Cressida Garnet has elicited various comments from Cather specialists. Arnold maintains that Cressida is not quite the blameless victim she appears to be at first glance. She is, in fact, to some extent guilty of corrupting her family by allowing them to use her. Her portrayal as the innocent victim of exploitation indicates that the narrator herself is "as blind to the singer's faults as Cressida's family is to her virtues." Ryder says that Cressida's struggle for recognition and her failed attempts at successful marriage have made her bitter. The artist herself is aware of this hardness, realizing that "her plight is Medusa's—an inability to share herself with other people." Wasserman asserts that in order to understand Cressida, the reader must take a serious look at her Svengali, Miletus Poppas. When he sends Carrie a German verse, the content of which suggests his selfless sacrifice to Cressida, "the fairy-tale substructure of this story emerges. Poppas is the hidden gnome with the secret, the Rumpelstiltskin who can help the poor man's daughter spin the raw material of straw into the gold of art. He is Cressida's submerged self, in charge (bizarrely) of her very memories." Given his positive role in the story, the reader must necessarily question Cather's motives for making Poppas a Jew and for using stereotypical notions in her portrait of him. She may be evoking "ancientness [and] timeless endurance" by making Poppas appear as "'old as Jewry,'" or perhaps she is using the fact that he is a Greek Jew to link the "twin roots of Western myth, the classical and the Hebraic." Her description of him may also be seen as anti-Semitic, "a view that obscures her many hints that Poppas represents the deep psychic levels that must be plumbed—mined, rather—before the diamond of art can be achieved."

Some critics give this story shrift, viewing it as one of Cather's poorer efforts. Stouck says that despite the "genuine pathos" of Cressida's search for love, the story is

"curiously flat," since the "narrator never enters into the story's imaginative design." Thurin says the story's "burlesque" ending is jarring; it does not fit with the rest of the tale. Williams considers the story a good idea that fails in the telling. Cather has enough material in this piece for a novel, but she falls very far short of having written it.

**Source:** Sheryl L. Meyering, '"The Diamond Mine,"' in *A Reader's Guide to the Short Stories of Willa Cather*, G. K. Hall and Co., 1994, pp. 67-72.

# Critical Essay #5

*In the following essay excerpt, Wasserman explores whether Cather's works contain anti-Semitic overtones and specifically examines Cather's choice of a Jewish character (Poppas) as "the image of the intuitive self" in "The Diamond Mine."*

The question of whether Willa Cather's writings betray an underlying anti-Semitism is not new. James Schroeter developed the accusation at some length in the mid-1960s, and Bernard Baum and John H. Randall III had made it explicit somewhat earlier. They conclude that indeed Cather was anti-Semitic in that she slipped into dismissive stereotype —a characteristic she shared with other early modernists, Schroeter adds— stereotypes of the "poolroom" variety that identify Jewishness with "commercial exploitation, secularization, and destruction of traditional values." His list of the writers who casually label a character "the Jew" or picture the Jew as outsider and spoiler includes stellar members of Cather's generation (Anderson, Dreiser) and of the generation succeeding (Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Elliot, Pound).

However, Cather is an especially painful case, because she alone had dignified immigrant Swedes, Norwegians, and Bohemians in her fiction, making them, indeed, her heroes and heroines. Such a defiance of literary decorum appears now so mild as to be invisible, but at the time it was a daring position. Hence, for Schroeter, it is doubly disappointing to find that Cather's sympathetic imagination faltered when she confronted the most recent immigrants, the Polish and Russian Jews who arrived in this country in such numbers in the 1890s and early 1900s.

In the thirty-some years since Randall and Schroeter were writing, two developments have necessitated another look at Cather's treatment of Jews. First, the wheel of critical attention in general has taken a decided turn. Attitudes toward race, class, and gender are not dismissed as awkward blemishes but are perceived as deeply significant clues both to dominating cultural thought patterns and to individual habits of mind. Texts are combed to note what is mentioned only tangentially, or what is not said at all. Such clues are nowhere more powerfully operative than in signaling how a people in a culture thought about those it blocked from full participation—the "others" who are kept silent, left out, or domesticated. To cite a much-repeated example, Jane Austen can be said to have legitimized West Indian colonialism when in *Mansfield Park* she makes a plantation the source of Sir Thomas's wealth. A more pertinent example is Cather's implied approval of Tom Outland's efforts to interest the Smithsonian in his Anasazi artifacts, with no expressed regard for Indian ancestral rights, thus legitimizing the gathering of Indian pottery into a museum as a pious act of preservation. In sum, the new rigor in cultural criticism asks to be more alert concerning attitudes toward racial or other minorities and to treat such attitudes more seriously.

While this scrutiny is largely directed at the ideological prevalent at a past time, it also highlights the observational power and moral sensitivity of the author. Despite a prevailing assumption that the writer as person is never free from a cultural context, we continue, paradoxically, to seek textual evidence that the writer as writer it prescient,

however waveringly or unconsciously, about matters that we, in a later time, regard as foundational.

Second, during the past thirty years, critical opinion about Cather has taken a dramatic turn, a 180-degree swing. In the sixties she was a minor writer—interesting, but limited by her backwardlooking fixation on the pioneer past. This view was shared by Randall, Schroeter, Leon Edel, even E. K. Brown, Cather's first "official" biographer. Today, a wealth of criticism has shown her to be an artist of sophistication and subtlety, both of method and of theme. A corollary of this new view is a new interest in Cather herself. The hearty, plain-speaking Westerner, a product of Populist midwestern small towns, as Randall describes her, has receded, her place taken by a bookish, self-conscious artist; this new perspective prompts us to question how aware she was of the culture she inhabited. It is no longer sufficient to point out that she describes some Jews as physically ugly (which she does) or as commercially successful (which she also does); in narrative context such portraits may be subverting the very stereotype represented, as Chaucer explodes antifeminism through the Wife of Bath. . .

Jews who figure in stories Cather wrote shortly after *The Song of the Lark*—Miletus Poppas in "The Diamond Mine" (1915) and Siegmund Stein in "Scandal" (1916)—are central to any discussion of Cather's anti-Semitism. Like Lichtenstein, they appear compounded of unpleasant traits (though they do not resemble each other), but unlike Lichtenstein, they are not humorous walk-ons. To confront these portraits is to confront the story in which each appears.

After finishing *The song of the Lark*, Cather had more to say about opera singers. What fascinated her was the difference between performing artists, who must please and charm the public, and artists such as herself—writers or painters—who work in private, or even anonymously.

The story of Cressida Garnet, the singer in "The Diamond Mine," is structured around her four marriages, but the narrator, Carrie, a friend from childhood, also describes her career, which Cressida pursued with undaunted energy through disappointments in her personal life. Carrie notes, however, that Cressida's success was owing to the voice coaching she received in Germany from Poppas, who thereafter became her accompanist— omnipresent, to the annoyance of family and husbands. Carrie is aware that Poppas is essential to Cressida's career. While she has vocal talent and ambition, she lacks musical intelligence. Poppas supplies "intuitions, discrimination, imagination, a whole twilight world of intentions and shadowy beginnings which were dark to Cressida." At the same time, Carrie finds Poppas, a Greek Jew, unsavory. There seems to be something demonic in his grayish skin, waxed moustache, and "alarming, deep-set eyes,—very close together . . . and always gleaming with something like defeated fury." "He was vulture of the vulture race, and he had the beak of one."

Only at the end of the story does Carrie, looking back, see Poppas's full worth. After Cressida's death on the *Titanic*, Poppas has retired to the Middle East, his "*sainte Asie*," for his health. From there he sends Carrie a letter that ends with four lines of verse from the closing scene of Wagner's *Das Rheingold*. In this scene the Rhine maidens sing of

the mysterious meaning of the gold: "Traulich und Treu / ist's nur in der Tiefe" (Loyalty, or comfort, and truth are found only in the depth). Finally, Carrie sees the totality of Poppas's devotion to Cressida, to her art, to the whole of art, and she writes the story we have read.

The tone of "The Diamond Mine" is reportorial; in fact, events surrounding Cressida's fourth husband so closely follow events of the life and death of the singer Nordica that publishers feared libel action. The figure of Poppas, however, edges toward allegory; he is the artist's deepest level of self, essential but not decipherable.

Why did Cather choose a Jew as the image of the intuitive self? It is a romantic—rather, Gothic— portrait. (It perhaps owes something to the mesmerizing voice coach, Svengali, in the novel *Trilby*, which is mentioned in the story.) When Carrie sees Poppas and others waiting at the White Star Line for news of *Titanic* survivors, she thinks he looks "old as Jewry"—ageless, timeless. Poppas might be an Old Testament Jew, returning to the Holy Land (his "*sainte Asie*"). By making him also Greek, Cather may have been trying to suggest the twin roots of Western art and aspiration. She had written, after listening to Zangwill, "The Hebrews, indeed, felt the beauty of holiness, but the Greeks felt the holiness of beauty."

The dynamics of "The Diamond Mine," then, point away from any anti-Semitic meaning —again, in fact, as in "Behind the Singer Tower," what is highlighted is prejudice that blinds. . .

It is unlikely that we can glean significant new insights about endemic anti-Semitism in the first decades of the century from Cather's fictional Jews, many and varied though they are. Possibly the sheer intensity of hatred on the part of cultural leaders (Fred Hallet, Pierce Tevis) is revealing. Though there is nothing here to equal the brutal, mindless tormenting of Robert Cohn (*The Sun Also Rises*), there is a surreal physicality in the way Hallet describes Merryweather and Tevis describes Stein, and in Kitty's sense of suffocation by Stein's guests, that brings home to us the visceral impact of this particular prejudice. An interesting dynamic also appears. Hallet's case against Merryweather is climaxed by his outrage at Merryweather's sufferance ("When you had him, he always crawled"), and Johnson is annoyed at Zablowski's patience with Hallet's teasing ("Why don't you *ever* hit back?" ). The comparison to Cohn's persecutors is again apt—they become increasingly maddened by his endurance of abuse. It is significant, I think, that in *The Professor's House* Cather again dramatizes this forbearance (Marsellus excuses his anti-Semitic brother-in-law, Scott, who has secretly blackballed Marsellus's admission to a club), but this time patient forgiveness (Christian, we might say) is admired. The Professor says, "Louie, you are magnanimous and magnificent!"

Of more particular interest is whether Cather should continue to be seen as harboring an anti-Semitic streak. Those commentators who base their answer on the incidence of "positive role models" in her fiction must say yes. The moral absolutists, too, who find any expressed consciousness of otherness evidence of racism or elitism, will find many instances of distancing, if only in the epithets Jew, Jewess, Hebrew. The rest of us must

read and ponder. We can at least agree that Cather was aware of Jews as a presence in American life and, more than any other writer of her time, chose to register that presence in fiction. Zablowski, the Nathenmeyers, Poppas, Stein, Becky Tietelbaum, Marsellus, the Rosens—just to list these figures, vivid and memorable—must be convincing. She witnessed, and put in her fiction, the anti-Semitic prejudices of the dominant culture. In her way, she combatted this bias, but hers was not the direct way of the social protest novel, and, clearly, she did not make it an overriding concern. She put the needs of the work first.

We can say of Cather as a writer, as Henry James said of Hawthorne, that she "is perpetually looking for images which shall place themselves in picturesque correspondence with the spiritual facts with which [she] is concerned." I think Poppas and Stein, and possibly the dark man of "The Old Beauty," were created for reasons of "picturesque correspondence," never mind that they may also have confirmed pervasive prejudices. At the same time, one of the "spiritual facts" dearest to Cather was the worth of art and learning, and the Nathanmeyers and the Rosens can be numbered among the many images by which she sought to dramatize her faith.

**Source:** Loretta Wasserman, "Cather's Semitism," in *Cather Studies*, Vol. 2, 1993, pp. 1-2.

# Topics for Further Study

Research the life of a modern celebrity whom you admire or have admired in the past, and compare this person's experiences with those of Cressida Garnet from the story. Imagine that Cressida has the opportunity to travel to our time, to spend a day observing modern culture. Assume the identity of your modern-day celebrity and write a time-traveling letter to Cressida, apprising her of how the roles and lifestyles of celebrities have changed in the last century.

Pick a field—artistic or otherwise—in which you would like to be "celebrated." Research what it takes to become famous in this field and read several interviews with representative celebrities. Use your findings to craft your own hypothetical interview for a major newspaper or magazine, in which the interviewer details your various successes and prompts you to tell his or her readers how you got there.

In the early twentieth century, opera stars like Lillian Nordica, the real-life inspiration for Cressida Garnet, achieved international fame. Research the status of opera today, then read a modern opera of your choosing. Write a threepage paper discussing what the opera is about, how it fits into modern opera, and what you like or dislike about opera in general.

In the story, Cressida extols the virtues of advertising, which was a relatively new field at the time. Research the types of advertising that were used in the 1900s or 1910s. Choose one representative medium and style and use them to create an advertisement for a modern-day product or service.

In an attempt to save money, Cressida books a modest room on the *Titanic*, even though she has traveled in style on all of her other journeys. Research the *Titanic's* layout and design and discuss what it meant to travel "in style" on the maiden voyage, including a description of the accommodations, the types of food, and any other amenities that upper-class passengers received.

Cressida has many ill-fated marriages in the story. Based on the character's gender and social status, research social and cultural trends of the time and discuss how society would have viewed this aspect of her life. Using your findings, write a short obituary for Cressida—focusing on her marriages and any other aspects you feel are relevant.

# Compare and Contrast

**1910s:** The music industry continues to grow, as an increasing number of Americans buy record players and listen to recorded music from their favorite musical stars.

**Today:** The music recording and publishing industry is threatened by the new MP3 file format, which stores music in a digital form. MP3 files can be downloaded from the Internet and played on various types of players. The Recording Industry Association of America, a music industry trade group, tries unsuccessfully to ban the use of some MP3 players.

**1910s:** The lives of American celebrities like Lillian Nordica become increasingly more in the spotlight. Some stars appreciate the free publicity, as it helps to boost their star power.

**Today:** Many public figures feel harrassed by paparazzi, a group of reporters who try to get pictures of celebrities by following them around everywhere. Diana, Princess of Wales, one of the world's biggest celebrities, is killed in a car crash on August 31, 1997. One of the alleged causes of the accident is the paparazzi—who apparently chased Princess Diana's car on motorbikes in an attempt to get some pictures.

**1910s:** The luxury liner *Titanic* hits an iceberg on its maiden voyage, causing it to sink into the ocean a little more than two hours later, taking 1,500 people with it.

**Today:** Frequently millions of dollars are spent on the production of a motion picture, including the cost of research, set design and construction, and special effects. At the time of release, James Cameron's internationally successful film *Titanic* (1997) is the most expensive film ever made, with a cost of approximately $200 million. It incorporates the latest information about how the ship actually sank. The film uses the excavation of the ship as a narrative framework for telling the tragic, fictional tale of Rose, an aristocratic woman about to be married, and Jack, a poor artist with whom she falls in love.

# What Do I Read Next?

*The Frenzy of Renown: Fame & Its History*, written by Leo Braudy and published by Vintage Books in 1997, examines the long and multifaceted history of fame. From Alexander the Great to Marilyn Monroe, Braudy's survey explores the relationship between celebrities and their audiences, discusses how and why certain people became famous, and examines how the lives of past celebrities have shaped our own current expectations of what it means to be in the limelight.

Cather's *The Song of the Lark* was first published in 1915, a year before she published "The Diamond Mine." The novel concerns Thea Kronberg, a woman with exceptional musical talent, who was born into poverty in a small town in Nebraska. Thea is unable to achieve her freedom until the man who loves her and desperately wants to marry her sets her free to pursue a career as an opera singer. A reprint edition was published by Houghton Mifflin Company in 1983.

Cather's writing style was influenced heavily by Henry James. James, who was one of America's greatest writers (although he eventually became a citizen of England), died the same year that Cather published "The Diamond Mine." James's novel *The American*, originally published in 1877, concerns the story of Christopher Newman—a self-made American millionaire who finds a bride in Europe but is treated horribly by the woman's parents, who reject him because of his non-aristocratic background. Newman is given an opportunity to get his revenge, and he must decide whether or not to take it. A reprint edition of the novel, *The American: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Sources, Criticism*, was published by W. W. Norton & Company in 1981.

*Twentieth-Century Music: A History of Musical Style in Modern Europe and America*, written by Robert P. Morgan and published by W. W. Norton & Company in 1991 as part of the Norton Introduction to Music History series, gives an overview of classical music throughout the majority of the twentieth century. The book is divided into three chronological periods for discussing the various composers and movements during the century.

Fred Plotkin's *Opera 101: A Complete Guide to Learning and Loving Opera*, is a good primer for anybody interested in learning more about opera. Plotkin, a performance manager for the Metropolitan Opera, walks beginners through the history of opera, how operas are produced, and how to attend an opera without looking like a novice. He also studies all of this background knowledge in context by examining eleven different operas in detail. The book was published by Hyperion in 1994.

*The Way to Tin Pan Alley: American Popular Song, 1866-1910* is a representative sampling of popular songs in the United States during the period of time from after the Civil War until the early twentieth century. This book was written by Nicholas E. Tawa and published by Schirmer Books in 1990.

*The Story of the Titanic As Told by Its Survivors* is a collection of some of the first-published accounts of the tragedy, as told in first-person form. It accurately portrays the social thinking and behavior of the time period and contains photographs and illustrations that evoke the era. Edited by Jack Winocour, the book was published by Dover Publications in 1960.

# Further Study

Acocella, Joan Ross, *Willa Cather and the Politics of Criticism*, Vintage Books, 2002.

This book is a controversial argument in favor of Willa Cather and her work. Acocella criticizes previous reviews of other critics—who sometimes focused on Cather's personal life and not her works themselves—and discusses how these undeserved reviews helped to obscure Cather's works.

Fiedler, Johanna, *Molto Agitato: The Mayhem behind the Music at the Metropolitan Opera*, Doubleday, 2001.

Fiedler, a press representative at the Metropolitan Opera, "the Met," for fifteen years, gives a thorough history of this massive musical enterprise. The book examines the Opera house from its inception in 1883 until today and discusses both the day-to-day dealings and the behind-the-scenes anecdotes from this famous American institution.

Gerber, Philip L., *Willa Cather*, Twayne Publishers, 1995.

This is an overview of Willa Cather's literary career. Her early, middle, and final stage novels are covered, as well as her contributions to short fiction and a collection of past and present biographies and criticism about this author.

Wasserman, Loretta, *Willa Cather: A Study of the Short Fiction*, Twayne Publishers, 1991.

This chronological study of Cather's short stories traces the themes and philosophies that she developed throughout her career, and it explores her contributions to early American modernism.

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**Introduction**

Purpose of the Book

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

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

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

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

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

Selection Criteria

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

How Each Entry Is Organized

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

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

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

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

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

Other Features

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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.

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