The Feathered Ogre Study Guide

The Feathered Ogre by Italo Calvino

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

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.

Contents

The Feathered Ogre Study Guide....1
Contents....2
Introduction....3
Author Biography....4
Plot Summary....5
Summary....7
Analysis....10
Characters....11
Themes....14
Style....16
Historical Context....19
Critical Overview....21
Criticism....23
Critical Essay #1....24
Critical Essay #2....28
Critical Essay #3....31
Topics for Further Study....36
Compare and Contrast....37
What Do I Read Next?....38
Further Study....39
Bibliography....40
Copyright Information....41

Introduction

"The Feathered Ogre" was first published in Italo Calvino's collection, *Italian Folk Tales*, in 1956. It is a transcription of a traditional story from the oral tradition in Italian culture. In this fairy tale, a man goes on a quest for a feather plucked from the body of a terrible ogre who lives in a cave on a mountain and eats every human being he sees. In his search for the ogre, the man stops four times and promises each of the people he meets to bring them back a feather from the ogre. When he reaches the ogre's cave, a beautiful girl, the ogre's wife, helps him to trick the ogre, so that they may both flee the cave with the desired feathers. On their way home, they give a feather to each of the parties the man had met along the way, and they share the ogre's solution to the predicament of each. When the man returns with a feather to cure the king, he is doubly rewarded, with a promise to marry the beautiful girl. In transcribing such folk tales, Calvino especially valued brevity, repetition and rhythm in the plot and structure of the tale. "The Feathered Ogre" is written with these stylistic concerns in mind, which lends the story a familiar feel to anyone who has been told fairy tales as a child. It contains familiar themes in which good triumphs over evil, the wicked are punished, and the brave hero is rewarded for his courageous good deeds with wealth and marriage to a beautiful girl.

Author Biography

Italo Calvino was born in Cuba on October 15, 1923, but raised in San Remo, Italy, a town close to France. His father was a professor of tropical agriculture at the University of Turin, and the young Calvino was encouraged to pursue the sciences but preferred literature. He was enrolled at the School of Agriculture at the University of Turin, when the German invasion of Italy during World War II interrupted his studies. At the age of twenty, after his parents were abducted by the Germans, Calvino joined an anti-fascist resistance organization called the Garibaldi Brigade. After the war, he returned to school to study literature, writing his thesis on the writer Joseph Conrad. He began writing in the forties as a journalist for *L'Unita*, a communist newspaper.

In 1947 he published the novel *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*, which was translated and published in English as *The Path to the Nest of Spiders* in 1957. In 1949 Calvino published a collection of short stories based on his experiences during the war, entitled *Ultimo viene il corvo* (*The Crow Comes Last*), a selection of which was translated into English in 1957 as *Adam, One Afternoon, and Other Stories*. His 1956 collection and retelling of Italian folktales, entitled *Fiabe italiane*, was translated into English and published as *Italian Fables* in 1961 and later as *Italian Folktales* in 1980. From 1959 to 1966, he worked as co-editor of the Italian journal *Il menabo*.

Calvino moved to Paris in 1964, where he married Esther Singer, an Argentine translator for UNESCO, with whom he had a daughter. His bestknown novel among English readers was originally published in Italian in 1979, translated and published in English as *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* in 1981, an experimental novel which addresses the reader directly as "You." A collection of his essays written between 1955 and 1978, originally published in Italian in 1980, was translated into English and published in 1986. Calvino moved to Rome with his family in 1980, where he stayed until his death of a stroke at the age of sixty-two, on September 19, 1985. Several of his works in progress were published posthumously, such as *Six Memos for the Next Millenium*, which includes five of the six lectures he had been preparing to give at Harvard University. Calvino continues to be widely regarded as one of the greatest writers of the twentieth century.

Plot Summary

A king falls ill and is told by his doctors that the only way he can be cured is by obtaining a feather from the ogre that eats every human being it sees. No one of his subjects is willing to go on a quest for one of the ogre's feathers, until one attendant bravely volunteers to go. The man is told that the ogre lives in a cave on a mountaintop. Along the way, he stops at an inn, where the innkeeper asks if the man will bring back a feather for him, for good luck, and if he will ask the ogre if he knows where the innkeeper's daughter, who disappeared years ago, may be. The man agrees and goes on his way. He then takes a ferry across the river, and the ferryman asks if he will bring back a feather for him and if he will ask the ogre how he can escape from the ferry, as he has not been able to go ashore for years. The man agrees and goes on his way. He then stops to rest by a fountain, and two noblemen ask if he will bring them back a feather and if he will ask the ogre why their fountain, which once spewed silver and gold, has gone dry. The man agrees to do this and goes on his way.

He next stops at a monastery, where the monks ask if he will bring them back a feather as well and if he will ask the ogre why it is that there has been so much discord among the monks for the past ten years. The monks also give the man advice about how to find the ogre. The man agrees to do this, and the next day he climbs the mountain and enters the seventh of seven caves, at the very end of which is the door to the ogre's home.

When the man knocks on the ogre's door, the ogre's wife, a beautiful girl, answers. When he explains that he has come for some of the ogre's feathers, she warns him that the ogre eats every human being he sees. The girl agrees to help him obtain the feathers and to answer the questions he has so that she can escape the ogre, whom she can't stand. When the ogre comes home, the man hides under the bed, and the girl serves the ogre his dinner.

When the girl and the ogre go to bed and the ogre has fallen asleep, the girl plucks one of his feathers and hands it to the man under the bed. When the ogre wakes up with an "ouch!," the girl explains that she had been dreaming that the monks in the monastery had been fighting amongst each other for the past ten years. The ogre responds that the monks have been in discord because the Devil has been living among them, dressed as a priest. When the ogre falls asleep again, the girl plucks another of his feathers and hands it to the man under the bed. When the ogre awakens a second time, she explains that she had been dreaming that the fountain owned by the two noblemen that used to spew silver and gold had dried up. The ogre responds that in fact the fountain has gone dry, because it is blocked up by a snake sleeping curled around a ball. He tells her that the noblemen would have to crush the snake's head under the ball so that the fountain would once again pour silver and gold. When the ogre falls back to sleep, the girl plucks another of his feathers and hands it to the man under the bed. When the ogre awakens a third time, she explains that she had been dreaming that the ferry man had been unable to leave his ferry for years. The ogre responds that this is true, and that he could only be freed from the ferry by jumping to shore before his next

passenger gets off the ferry. That way, the passenger would be stuck on the ferry, and the ferry man would be free to go. When the ogre falls back to sleep, the girl plucks a forth feather and hands it to the man under the bed. When the ogre awakens a fourth time, she explains that she had been dreaming that the innkeeper had lost his daughter and had not seen her for years. The ogre responds that she herself is the daughter of the innkeeper.

The next morning, after the ogre leaves for work, the girl and the man flee the ogre's cave together. They first stop at the monastery, where they give the monks a feather and explain that the Devil is living among them, dressed as a priest, and that if all the real priests do good deeds, the Devil will be found out; this they do, and the Devil is sent away. They then stop at the fountain of the noblemen, to whom they give a feather and explain how to unblock their fountain. After they have taken the ferry to the opposite shore and gotten off, they give the ferryman a feather and explain to him how he can be free from the ferry. When they come to the inn, they give the innkeeper a feather, and he is so grateful for his daughter's return that he gives the man her hand in marriage. The man then brings a feather to the king, who recovers from his illness and rewards the man. When the man explains that he is off to be married, the king doubles his reward.

The ogre, meanwhile, upon discovering his wife's absence, goes in search of her and the man, with the intention of eating them both. When he takes the ferry across the river, the ferryman jumps ashore, leaving the ogre trapped on the ferry.

Summary

The classic themes of good versus evil and rewarded bravery are told in "The Feathered Ogre," a short Italian folk tale about a man who seeks a feather from an ogre to heal a king. The man ultimately gains the ogre's wisdom for the acquaintances he has made along the journey.

As the story begins, the king's doctors tell the ruler that in order to regain his health he must obtain a feather from an ogre. This is not an easy job because the ogre eats every human in sight. Only one of the king's attendants is brave enough to volunteer for this dangerous mission, and he is armed only with the information that the ogre lives in one of seven caves on the mountaintop.

The king's emissary walks until dark. He seeks shelter at an inn, and the innkeeper, when learning of the man's mission, requests an ogre feather for himself because they are good luck. The innkeeper also asks the man to find out from the ogre what has happened to the innkeeper's daughter, who disappeared many years ago and never returned. The man happily agrees to the innkeeper's requests and starts his journey again the next morning.

When the man reaches a river, he encounters a ferryman and explains the purpose of his journey. The ferryman is intrigued and asks for a feather for himself. He would like the man to ask the ogre why he has not been able to get off the ferry and go ashore for so many years. The man agrees to the ferryman's requests and continues on his way, stopping at a fountain to eat his lunch.

Two noblemen approach the king's man, and the man shares the nature of his journey with them. The noblemen ask for a feather also and would like to know if the ogre can explain why their fountain, which used to spew silver and gold, has now run dry. Once more the man agrees to the requests for a feather and information and continues on his journey.

As nightfall approaches, the man reaches a monastery and receives shelter and advice on how best to approach the ogre. The monastery's prior tells the king's man that there are seven caves at the top of the mountain, and the ogre will be found in the seventh one. The man must enter the dark cave at noon when the ogre will not be inside. The ogre's beautiful young wife, who will instruct the man on what to do next, will meet the man. The monks provide candles and matches and warn the man of the ogre's propensity to eat human beings.

In exchange for the monks' help, they ask the man to inquire of the ogre why there has been such unrest and trouble among the monks for the past ten years. Prior to this time, the monastery had been a place of serenity, but it is now a source of bickering and conflict. The king's man agrees to the request and begins his ascent of the mountain the next morning.

By eleven o'clock, the man has reached the mountaintop, and he rests until noon, when he enters the ogre's cave. The man lights the candles and knocks on the door, which is opened by a lovely young woman. The woman is frightened because her husband, the ogre, eats every human being he sees. The king's man explains the purpose of his journey, and the young woman agrees to help him retrieve the coveted feathers because she has been held captive for years and sees this man as a means of escape.

The young woman tells the king's man that he must hide under the bed so that the ogre will not see him and eat him. When the ogre has fallen asleep for the night, the young wife will pull out the requested four feathers. The young woman begins to prepare the ogre's dinner because his smell of humans is particularly intense when he is hungry. The ogre arrives home at six o'clock and can immediately smell the presence of a human. The young wife hurriedly feeds the ogre, who can still smell a human and searches high and low in the cave to no avail.

Finally, the couple retires, and the king's man is still hiding under the bed. The young woman informs the man that she will pretend to be dreaming when she plucks each feather so that the ogre will not suspect anything. Upon plucking the first feather the ogre is irritated, and his wife apologizes. She says that she pulled the feather while dreaming of the trouble at the monastery at the base of the mountain. The ogre tells her that the devil took up residence ten years ago, and if the monks would do only good deeds, the devil would quickly be weeded out.

A short while later, the young woman plucks the second feather, and she explains that this time, she was in a dream about the noblemen's fountain which has run dry. The ogre tells her that the men must dig to the mouth of the fountain and kill a snake that is coiled there.

A few minutes later, the young woman plucks the third feather and apologizes for her behavior. She asks the ogre why the ferryman has not been able to leave his ferry for so many years. The ogre replies that all the ferryman has to do is make sure he jumps off the ferry before his passenger, who will then not be able to leave. By the time the young woman plucks the fourth feather, the ogre is out of patience. This time, she asks the question about the innkeeper's daughter and discovers that she is that girl who disappeared so long ago.

The ogre leaves the cave at six o'clock the next morning, and the king's man crawls out from under the bed with a package of the four feathers. He flees with the young woman out of the cave and back down the mountain. The king's man and the young woman stop by the monastery to tell the monks that the devil is living inside and that good deeds will separate him from the others. The monks heed the advice and before long the devil is routed from the monastery for good.

The couple meets the noblemen next, and they explain the method of returning their fountain to its original state. Before long, the fountain again spouts silver and gold. The ferryman is the next person on their trip, and the king's man hands over the feather. Upon safely reaching shore, he shares how the ferryman can get off the ferry.

Finally, the couple reaches the inn where the king's man delivers the daughter to the safety of her father. The innkeeper is so overjoyed that he gives the young woman to the king's man in marriage. The king's man is happy, but he must first visit the king to deliver the ogre's feather and to ask permission to marry. When the king's man arrives, the ogre's feather heals the king, who doubles the man's reward out of gratitude, and the man returns to the inn to marry the innkeeper's daughter.

The ogre does not share such a happy fate, as he has come down from the mountain in search of his wife and hopped on the ferry to cross the river. Unfortunately for the ogre, the ferryman is able to jump off first when they reach the shore, and the ogre is trapped forever on the floating ferry.

Analysis

The themes of good versus evil and rewarded bravery are the two most important ones in this story, which reads like a fairy tale with a typical happy ending. Also typical to a folk tale is a task or mission that most mortals are unwilling or unable to undertake. The king's man volunteers to undertake the quest to obtain the ogre feather when no one else steps forward.

This assertiveness immediately positions the king's man as the protagonist, or hero, of the story because of his bravery. The king's man is also thoughtful and sincere, adding more admirable qualities to his personality and making him more heroic for his internal bravery. The man's willingness to help common people as well as the king positions him as being of noble character and worthy of the king's generosity as well as married bliss at the end of the tale.

The story makes the point that it is not always knowledge or shrewdness that is valued or rewarded, but rather integrity and nobility of spirit. The ogre can cunningly manipulate his world and has the inside knowledge of many secrets that plague the people of the village, but he chooses to withhold the information. This ultimately results in his bad fortune when confronted with goodness in the form of the king's man.

The author weaves in fantasy elements so that the story is enjoyable for readers of all ages. The most notable elements are the fountain that spurts silver and gold, the ferryboat that is doomed to drift with its last remaining passenger, and the feathers that have beneficial properties. The author chooses to relate his themes via fantasy elements so that its engaging qualities will lure readers and urge them to complete the story to glean the core messages.

The story has an almost singsong lyrical style like most fairy tales, which deliver timeless morals that provide contemporary lessons for readers of all ages.

Analysis

The themes of good versus evil and rewarded bravery are the two most important ones in this story, which reads like a fairy tale with a typical happy ending. Also typical to a folk tale is a task or mission that most mortals are unwilling or unable to undertake. The king's man volunteers to undertake the quest to obtain the ogre feather when no one else steps forward.

This assertiveness immediately positions the king's man as the protagonist, or hero, of the story because of his bravery. The king's man is also thoughtful and sincere, adding more admirable qualities to his personality and making him more heroic for his internal bravery. The man's willingness to help common people as well as the king positions him as being of noble character and worthy of the king's generosity as well as married bliss at the end of the tale.

The story makes the point that it is not always knowledge or shrewdness that is valued or rewarded, but rather integrity and nobility of spirit. The ogre can cunningly manipulate his world and has the inside knowledge of many secrets that plague the people of the village, but he chooses to withhold the information. This ultimately results in his bad fortune when confronted with goodness in the form of the king's man.

The author weaves in fantasy elements so that the story is enjoyable for readers of all ages. The most notable elements are the fountain that spurts silver and gold, the ferryboat that is doomed to drift with its last remaining passenger, and the feathers that have beneficial properties. The author chooses to relate his themes via fantasy elements so that its engaging qualities will lure readers and urge them to complete the story to glean the core messages.

The story has an almost singsong lyrical style like most fairy tales, which deliver timeless morals that provide contemporary lessons for readers of all ages.

Characters

The Beautiful Girl

The innkeeper's daughter, a "beautiful girl," is first encountered by the protagonist as the wife of the ogre, who has been his captive for years. She comes up with a scheme to take four feathers from the ogre, answer each of the four questions, and escape with the man, without either of them being eaten by the ogre. She tells the man to hide under the bed while she feeds the ogre his dinner, and when she and the ogre go to bed, she plucks one of his feathers, which awakens him, at which point she tells him she has been dreaming, and he explains the significance of her dream. She repeats this four times during the night, handing each feather to the man under the bed as she does so. The fourth dream that she describes to the ogre is about the innkeeper, whose daughter disappeared years ago. The ogre explains that she herself is the daughter of the innkeeper. The next morning, the girl flees with the man, and, when they reach the innkeeper, he is so grateful for the return of his daughter that he immediately gives her hand in marriage to the man.

The Ferry Man

The protagonist first encounters the ferry man on his way to the cave of the ogre. The ferry man asks if the protagonist will bring back one of the feathers of the ogre and if he will ask the ogre why he has been stuck working on the ferry for years and cannot get off. When the girl tells the ogre she has been dreaming of this predicament of the ferry man, the ogre explains that the only way for him to get off the ferry is to jump ashore before his next passenger gets off the ferry; that way he will be free, and the passenger will be stuck working as the ferry man. When the man and the girl take the ferry on their way home, they give him the feather he asked for. Only after they have gotten off on the other side of the river do they explain to him how he can escape the ferry. It so happens that his next passenger is the ogre himself, who has no idea that the ferry man has been informed of this. Before the ogre can step ashore, the ferry man jumps off, and the ogre must stay on the boat.

The Friars

The man first encounters the friars at the monastery on his way to the cave of the ogre. The friars inform him that the ogre lives in the back of the seventh of seven caves, and they give him a candle and matches to light his way. They also ask if he will bring them back a feather from the ogre and if he will ask the ogre why they have had nothing but discord in the monastery for the past ten years. When the girl pretends to be dreaming of the friars, the ogre explains that the Devil has been living among them, disguised as a priest, for the past ten years, and that is why they have not been able to get along. The ogre says that if all of the real priests do good deeds, the Devil will be found out,

and they can get rid of him. On their way home, the man and the girl give the friars a feather and tell them what the ogre has said. The true friars all go about doing good deeds, and the Devil is found out and sent away.

The Innkeeper

The innkeeper is the first person encountered by the man on his way to find the ogre. The innkeeper asks if he will bring back one of the ogre's feathers for good luck and if he will ask the ogre where his daughter, who disappeared years ago, has gone. When the beautiful girl who is the wife of the ogre pretends to have dreamed about the innkeeper's predicament, the ogre tells her that the innkeeper is her own father and that she is the daughter who has disappeared. When the man and the girl reach the innkeeper after escaping the ogre, he is so grateful that he immediately gives her hand in marriage to the man.

The King

The king falls ill and is told by his doctors that he can only be cured with a feather from the ogre. Only one of his attendants, the man who is the protagonist of the story, is brave enough to volunteer to find the ogre and bring back one of his feathers. When the man returns with the feather, the king recovers from his illness and rewards him. When the man tells the king he is going to be married, the king doubles his reward.

The King's Doctors

The king's doctors advise him that the only way for him to recover from his illness is to obtain one of the feathers from the ogre. Their advice turns out to be true, as the king does recover once the man has brought him a feather.

The King's Attendant

The protagonist of the story is one of the king's "most loyal and courageous attendants." He is the only one brave enough to volunteer to obtain a feather from the ogre in order to cure the king's illness. On his way to find the ogre, he stops at four different places, at each of which he is asked if he will also bring back a feather and ask the ogre a question. The man agrees to each request without hesitation. When he reaches the home of the ogre, he is greeted by a beautiful girl, who is the ogre's wife and captive. She instructs him to hide under the ogre's bed, while she plucks his feathers and hands them to the man. The next morning, he and the girl flee the ogre, bringing feathers and answers to each of the four questions. When they reach the innkeeper, whose daughter has been a captive of the ogre, he is given her hand in marriage. When the man brings a feather to the king, which causes the king to recover from his illness, he is rewarded, and, after he tells the king he is going to be married, his reward is doubled.

The Ogre

The feathered ogre lives in the back of the seventh of seven caves on top of a mountain. One of his feathers has the power to cure the king of his illness, and his feathers are also known to be good luck, but he is known for eating every human being he sees. When he comes home for his dinner, he can smell the man hiding under the bed but cannot find him. After he goes to bed, the girl, his wife, tricks him in order to obtain several of his feathers and get him to answer each of the four questions. After he leaves for work the next morning, the girl flees with the man. When the ogre comes home and finds her missing, he goes off in search of them, with the intention of eating them both. But when he takes a ride across the river on the ferry, the ferry man hops ashore before him, and so he cannot leave the boat and is stuck being the ferry man.

The Two Noblemen

The protagonist encounters the two well-dressed noblemen when he sits down to eat at a fountain on his way to find the ogre. The two noblemen ask if he will bring them back one of the ogre's feathers and if he will ask the ogre why their fountain, which once spewed silver and gold, has gone dry. When the girl pretends to be dreaming of the predicament of the two noblemen, the ogre explains that the fountain has been stopped up by a snake that is sleeping curled around a ball at the bottom of the fountain. The ogre tells her that the noblemen must crush the head of the snake with the ball in order for the fountain to flow again. When the girl and the man reach the noblemen on their way home, the noblemen take this advice, and their fountain once again spews silver and gold.

Themes

Heroism

The protagonist of a fairy tale is often a courageous man who risks mortal danger in order to achieve some noble quest. The king's attendant in this story is heroic in every way. He is the only one "loyal and courageous" enough to go in search of a feather from the ogre. Along his journey, he accepts further challenges without hesitation. As a result, he performs many good deeds, helping others out of their predicaments. With the help of the heroine, he effectively prevents the ogre from doing further harm in the world. His heroism is abundantly rewarded in the end with both material wealth from the king and the hand in marriage of a "beautiful girl."

Good versus Evil

Most fairy tales make clear distinctions between good and evil and generally demonstrate that good always triumphs over evil. The ogre in this story is a clear embodiment of evil. He eats every human being he sees and even kidnaps a girl to hold her hostage and make her his wife. Because the ogre is pure evil, the reader is not expected to have any sympathy for the ogre in the end, when he is tricked into being stuck on the ferry boat. A parallel to the ogre is the presence of the Devil in the monastery, who has disguised himself as a priest and caused discord among them for ten years. Another figure of evil is the snake that has stopped up the fountain of the two noblemen. Based on the Bible, the snake in the Garden of Eden is a symbol of pure evil. In contrast with the ogre, the Devil, and the snake, all of the human beings in this story are helpless victims of these evil forces. The protagonist, the king's attendant, represents the greatest force of good, as he is the only one brave enough to risk death in order to help save everyone else from evil. As a result of his good deeds, the Devil is forced out of the monastery, the snake's head is crushed, and the ogre is trapped on the ferry boat, where he cannot harm anyone again.

Loyalty

Like bravery and courage, this story demonstrates that loyalty brings rewards. The protagonist is described as one of the king's most "loyal" attendants, who is the only one willing to risk his own life in order to cure the king of his illness. It is this man's loyalty to his king that initially leads to his quest for the ogre's feather. In the end, his loyalty is greatly rewarded by the king.

Courage and Bravery

Like many fairy tales, this story is about heroic acts of bravery on the part of the protagonist. The protagonist is one of the king's "most courageous" attendants. None of

the king's other subjects are brave enough to go in search of the ogre who eats every human being he sees, but the protagonist shows his bravery by saying, simply, "I will go." When the people he meets on his journey to find the ogre ask if he will bring them back a feather and ask the ogre a question, the man cheerfully agrees to their requests without hesitation, even though each new request makes his mission that much more dangerous. When the man knocks at the ogre's door, the ogre's wife, a beautiful girl, warns him of the danger he is in, as her husband eats every human being he sees. But the man shows his bravery once again with his matter-of-fact attitude in the face of death: "'Since I'm already here, I'll stay and try my luck. If I get eaten, that's that.'" In the end, the man's courage and bravery are abundantly rewarded.

Good Deeds

Each request that the man accepts, starting with the king's need for a feather from the ogre in order to cure his illness, is in the service of selflessly helping others who are in need. He also performs good deeds in promising each of the four parties he meets along his journey to ask the ogre for a solution to their predicament. When he follows through on these promises, the problems of each party are solved. While the hero accepts each challenge without promise of any material reward for his efforts, he is richly rewarded in the end. The message of this tale is that doing good deeds will be rewarded with love and material wealth.

Style

The Folk Tale

"The Feathered Ogre" was originally published in Calvino's book, *Italian Folktales*, in which he transcribed stories from the oral tradition in Italian culture. However, even read out of this context, this story clearly resembles the familiar folk or fairy tales children are often told. Because they originate in an oral tradition, folk tales are generally not attributable to any particular author but have been passed down through generations of storytellers. Because of this, there are often several versions of any one folk tale, and the writer who chooses to transcribe them must decide which elements of the various versions of the story to include in the written text. Thus, although Calvino gathered this story from other sources, it is also in part his own creation and bears the mark of his own personal writing style in re-telling these traditional tales.

Magic and Fantasy

Fairy tales often include elements of magic and fantasy, which require the reader's "suspension of disbelief," in order to accept the premise of the story. While everyone knows there is no such thing as an ogre, the ogre is a standard character in fairy tales that most readers can imagine with only minimal description. The only feature of this ogre that the narrator specifically describes is that he has feathers. Based only on this one physical aspect, the reader is invited to use her or his imagination in picturing what such a creature would look like. Furthermore, the ogre's feathers have the magical properties to bring people luck and cure the king of his illness. The character of the ferry man also implies that some magical forces are at work in this story, as the ferry boat seems to cast a spell on those so unlucky as to get stuck on it at the wrong juncture. The ferryman is unable to leave the ferry until he tricks the ogre into falling under this spell and getting stuck on the boat instead of the man. Another element of fantasy is the fountain that spews silver and gold; only in the realm of fantasy could such a fountain exist. These elements of magic and fantasy are accepted by the reader in the context of the fairy tale.

The Quest/Journey/Adventure

As do many folk tales, "The Feathered Ogre" tells the story of a courageous man who must go on a journey in order to seek out some type of monster or dragon or ogre, obtain some item or items guarded by the evil beast, and return in order to receive a reward, and, usually, a beautiful girl or princess to marry. This type of story is in the form of a quest or journey, requiring bravery, and, often the help of various advisors along the way.

Repetition

In his essay "Quickness," from *Six Memos for the Next Millenium*, Calvino explains that the oral tradition of storytelling "stresses repetition." The predictable repetitions in folk tales create a "rhythm," which structures the entire story: "Just as in poems and songs the rhymes help to create rhythm, so in prose narrative there are events that rhyme." This predictability and repetition, Calvino points out, is part of the pleasure of folk tales: "A child's pleasure in listening to stories lies partly in waiting for things he expects to be repeated: situations, phrases, formulas." "The Feathered Ogre" contains many repetitions, or "events that rhyme." For example, the protagonist makes four stops on his way to find the ogre; at each stop, the people he meets ask if he will bring them one of the ogre's feathers, and if he will ask the ogre a question. These questions are repeated when the ogre's wife tricks him into explaining the solution to each of the four questions by awakening him four times during the night. On their way home, after fleeing the ogre's cave, the man and the girl stop at each of the four places to repeat to the people there the solution to their problem.

Brevity

In recording Italian folk tales, Calvino, as stated in his essay "Quickness," was especially interested in "the economy, rhythm, and hard logic with which they are told." He states that, "The very first characteristic of a folktale is economy of expression," and that he himself "found most enjoyment when the original text was extremely laconic." "The Feathered Ogre" is narrated in this type of "laconic" style, which does not dwell on "unnecessary details." For example, in the opening of the story, "Not a word is said about what illness the king was suffering from, or why on earth an ogre should have feathers, or what those caves were like. But everything mentioned has a necessary function to the plot."

The Happy Ending

Part of the pleasure of folk tales is the predictability of the happy ending. In this story, the protagonist is rewarded for his efforts, both by receiving the hand in marriage of the beautiful girl and by the king's reward, which is doubled. The details of the relationship between the man and the girl are unnecessary in a folk tale, as the elements of the story are reduced to the most basic plot points, implying that the reader (or listener) will assume the "happily ever after" status of the romantic couple.

Setting

Like most folk tales, this story is set in an unnamed country during an unspecified period in history, although one can generally assume that it takes place long ago. The non-specificity of the setting is in part what allows for the suspension of disbelief required of the reader in order to accept the unlikely, magical, and unrealistic elements of the story.

Characterization

None of the characters in this story has a specific or proper name. Because it is a folk tale, each character represents a familiar type. This adds to the brevity of the story, as the reader (or listener) is expected to be able to fill in the details based on having heard many such tales before. The charac ters are named only by their status and occupation, rather than by any indication of individuality or developed character. Note that the characters in the story include the following: the king, the king's attendant, an innkeeper, an ogre, two noblemen, a group of priests, a "beautiful girl," and so on.

Historical Context

Collections of Traditional Folk Tales

"The Feathered Ogre" was originally published as part of the collection *Italian Folk Tales* (1956), which Calvino transcribed and retold from the oral tradition. The most famous collection of folk tales is probably that of the Brother's Grimm, who wrote a comprehensive collection of traditional German folk tales, which have been republished many times. Less commonly known is Charles Chesnutt's 1899 collection of African-American folk tales, entitled *The Conjure Woman*. In 1935 Zora Neale Hurston published *Mules and Men*, a collection of African-American folk tales she gathered from oral stories during her travels in rural Florida and Louisiana. Leslie Marmon Silko's book, *Storyteller* (1981), translates oral traditions from Native-American culture into a written form.

Mussolini and Fascist Italy

Calvino was a staunch critic of the fascist regime of Benito Mussolini in Italy. Mussolini, an ex-socialist, was the leader of the fascist movement in Italy, which had gained popularity by 1920. In 1921 Mussolini formed the National Fascist Party. After Mussolini organized a "March on Rome" by fascist sympathizers, the king of Italy, hoping to curb social unrest, appointed him to form a constitutional government, and in 1923 Mussolini became Prime Minister. In 1939 Mussolini formed an alliance with Hitler's Germany. In 1943 after the Allies had invaded Sicily, the Fascist Grand Council asked the king to depose Mussolini from power, which he did, immediately appointing a new prime minister. Mussolini was arrested shortly thereafter but was eventually rescued from prison by the Germans. Mussolini was shot and killed while fleeing to Switzerland in 1945.

Italian Neorealism

Several of Calvino's works are in the style of Italian neorealism, a literary and cinematic style that emerged in the post-War era. As a response to the traumatic experiences of the War, Italian writers in the post-War period focused on realistic portrayals, often based on their own experiences of life in wartime Italy. Calvino's early novel and short story collection were based on his own experiences during this time. Italian neorealist cinema developed a documentary style of narrative film, which often depicted every day people in their daily lives, in an attempt to capture the experiences of war-torn Italy.

Resistance to Fascism under Mussolini

Communist organizations in Italy were a primary locus of anti-fascist activity. However, Mussolini's crackdown on anti-fascist activity, beginning in 1925, as well as state-

sponsored censorship, significantly curbed the strength of any resistance movement. Communist leaders were sent away to remote prisons or executed, and national censorship of the press, radio, and cinema curbed the expression of anti-fascist sentiment and the spread of dissident ideas. The Catholic Church, on the other hand, remained a significant supporter of antifascism, despite government attempts to curb such activities. Anti-fascism had gained sympathizers by the late-1930s, and many opposed the institution of anti-Semitic policies in 1938. It was during World War II that Calvino joined the Resistance movement, which he wrote about in his early novel and collection of short stories. The active part the Communists had played in the Resistance during the War made it a popular movement in the post-War era.

Critical Overview

"The Feathered Ogre" was originally published in *Fiabe Italiane*, Calvino's 1956 collection and retelling of two hundred traditional Italian fables and folktales. It was translated into English by Louis Brigante and published as *Italian Fables* in 1961. In 1980 it was published in a new translation by George Martin, with the title *Italian Folktales*.

The significance of Calvino's collection to the study of international folklore is probably best explained by Calvino himself in his introduction to *Italian Folk Tales*. In tackling the project, Calvino wished to produce a definitive volume of Italian folktales and fables equivalent to that of the Brothers Grimm, whose name, since the early nineteenth century, has become synonymous with the German folk tale. Calvino wished to produce a "readable master collection of Italian folktales which would be popular in every sense of the word." In approaching the task, Calvino studied the transcriptions of anthropologists and ethnographers who in the nineteenth century interviewed storytellers in peasant villages throughout Italy, most of whom Calvino describes as "little old women." In choosing which tales, and which version of each tale, to retell, Calvino took into consideration a representative sampling from various regions of Italy; he also translated into a more modern, standardized Italian the many dialects represented by the original storytellers, while maintaining the local flavor of each dialect. Calvino stresses the role of the storyteller in the oral tradition of the folktale: "At the core of the narrative is the storyteller, a prominent figure in every village or hamlet, who has his or her own style and appeal. And it is through this individual that the timeless folktale is linked with the world of its listeners and with history."

Calvino was also a journalist and co-editor for several Italian socialist periodicals, a novelist, short story writer, and essayist. His early published fiction was written during the post-World-War-II period of Italian neorealism in literature, which focused on the experiences of everyday people during the War and post-War era. His novel *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*, first published in 1947, was translated into English and published in 1957 as *The Path to the Nest of Spiders*. His collection of short stories written between 1945 and 1949, *Ultimo viene il corvo* (The Crow Comes Last), first published in 1949—twenty of which were translated into English and published in 1957 as *Adam, One Afternoon, and Other Stories* —were based on his experiences during the War.

Calvino became a darling of postmodern and post-structuralist literary theorists for his experimental novels, which stretched the boundaries of the novelistic form. *Le citta invisibili*, first published in 1972, translated and published in English in 1974 as *Invisible Cities*, brought his first international recognition as an important writer. In this story, Kublai Khan converses with Marco Polo. *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore*, first published in 1979, translated into English and published in 1981 as *If On a Winter's Night a Traveler*, addresses the reader as "You" and consists of ten novels within one frame story, structured by multiple digressions and commentary on the novelistic form, role of the narrator, and expectations of the reader. The meta-narrative level of self-

consciousness with which the novel is written is captured in the opening line, "You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino's new novel, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*."

Franco Ricci, in *Italian Novelists Since World War II*, has summed up the scope of Calvino's work in the context of modern literary history: ". . . it is a measure of his greatness and uncommon historical awareness that from his early neorealist tales to the meta-narrative modes of his later fiction he can be said to reflect the major literary trends of the past forty years. He is and will continue to be one of the most important writers of the twentieth century."

Criticism

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

Critical Essay #1

Brent has a Ph.D. in American culture, specializing in cinema studies, from the University of Michigan. She is a freelance writer and teaches courses in American cinema. In the following essay, she discusses the allegorical significance of the morals of the story.

One of the elements of the fairy tale that gives it lasting and universal appeal is that the events of the story occur within a universe of clearly defined values, in which good always triumphs over evil and virtues are rewarded with material and personal riches. Calvino's retelling of the Italian folk tale "The Feathered Ogre," in his 1956 collection, *Italian Folk Tales*, demonstrates the values of loyalty, self-sacrifice, bravery, courage, generosity, amiability, cleverness, good deeds, and integrity. In the following essay, the ways in which the hero of the story embodies these values, which result in the stamping out of evil forces and the rewarding of good deeds, will be discussed. An allegorical interpretation of the story makes it relevant to the modern reader as a lesson in important values.

As in most fairy tales, this story ends with the triumph of good over evil. The ogre is punished in the end, when he is stuck on the ferry boat. Likewise, the Devil is driven out of the monastery. The virtues of the hero, and the heroine, are abundantly rewarded. When the man and the girl reach the innkeeper, he is so grateful for the return of his daughter that he immediately gives her hand in marriage to the man. The man is then doubly rewarded for bringing the king the feather that cures him of his illness. With the ogre safely stuck on the ferry, unable to do further harm in the world, and the hero assured both marriage to a "beautiful girl" and abundant monetary wealth, this story closes with the proverbial "happily ever after" that characterizes the fairy tale ending.

Thus, the values and morals of "The Feathered Ogre" meet the standard expectations a reader (or listener) has of a fairy tale. Yet, to the modern reader, the moral of the story may at first seem outdated and overly simplistic. Unfortunately, evil in the world takes more complex forms than that of an ogre, and monetary wealth is not so easy to come by, nor does it necessarily bring happiness, whereas love and marriage prove greater challenges in real life than is implied by such a story. However, fairy tales, which serve the cultural role of teaching basic values to children, retain their significance in a complex, modern society when interpreted in allegorical terms. An allegory is a tale that is meant to be understood, not literally but in terms of its symbolic significance. For instance, the predicament of the two noblemen is that their fountain, which used to spout gold and silver, is stopped up by a snake sleeping curled around a ball. The snake, based on the story of the Garden of Eden in the Old Testament, is a classic symbol of evil, the Devil in disguise. Therefore, the allegorical implications are that a force of evil (the snake) is the cause of the problem of the noblemen. In order to get their fountain flowing again, they must crush the head of the snake with the ball, an allegory for crushing the forces of evil that have obstructed their lives. Although the result, that their fountain once again flows gold and silver, is in a literal sense fantastical as well as materialistic, it can be interpreted allegorically as a symbol of the less

tangible rewards that result from doing good deeds and counteracting the forces of evil in the world. Likewise, the "evil" embodied by the ogre and the Devil, may be read allegorically as representing a host of more concrete "evils," or problems facing the world, such as poverty, oppression, and so forth.

The man's journey to obtain a feather from the ogre takes the form of a quest. Though most people do not have the opportunity to travel through dangerous territory on a heroic mission, the quest may be interpreted allegorically in terms of goals or ambitions. The quest for the ogre's feather and the hero's willingness to risk death and to persevere in the face of danger is an allegory for setting and pursuing an ambitious goal that, in order to reach it, requires persistence and the willingness to take risks or to overcome obstacles.

The protagonist of the story, one of the king's attendants, is notable for his loyalty, bravery, and self-sacrifice in volunteering to seek out the ogre. When the king falls ill and is told by his doctors that he can only be cured by obtaining a feather from the ogre who eats every human being he sees, no one of his subjects is willing to risk death in order to save the king's life: "the king passed the word on to everybody, but no one was willing to go to the ogre." The hero, however, described as "one of the king's most loyal and courageous attendants," dem demonstrates his loyalty and courage by volunteering to seek out the deadly ogre for no other reason than out of allegiance to the king. There is no obvious personal gain to be derived from this deed, and he is promised no reward for his efforts. Nevertheless, his bravery and courage are demonstrated by the simple and straightforward words with which he agrees to the quest: "I will go."

The hero's willingness to risk self-sacrifice, as well as his generosity and amiability, are further demonstrated at each of his four stops along the way to the cave of the ogre. Upon his first stop at the inn, the innkeeper asks to be brought back a feather from the ogre, "since they are so beneficial," but offers the man no reward or compensation in return, although he is well aware that it is a dangerous mission. The man's simple and amiable response, "I'll be glad to," again demonstrates both his courage and his willingness to risk danger for the benefit of others. When the ferry man asks him to bring back a feather, he again answers simply and amiably, "Yes, of course I'll bring you one." And, when the well-dressed noblemen, who are obviously men of great wealth, ask to be brought a feather without mention of reward or compensation, the man replies, "I certainly will."

The danger faced by the hero in accepting such a mission is reinforced by the prior of the monastery, who warns him, "My poor man. . . if you are unmindful of all the danger, you'll certainly lose your life. This is no laughing matter." But the hero is undaunted by such warnings and graciously thanks the prior for this information, replying simply, "How good of you to tell me all these things I didn't know." When he reaches the door of the ogre, he is once more warned of the mortal danger he faces, as the ogre's wife with great alarm exclaims, "You don't know my husband! He eats every human being he sees!" Yet the hero demonstrates his dedication to his quest, as well as his courage and bravery in the face of death, with the matter-of-fact statement that, "I came for some feathers. Since I'm already here, I'll stay and try my luck. If I get eaten, that's that."

The hero's loyalty to his king, his bravery in volunteering to obtain a feather from the deadly ogre, and his courage in facing the challenges of such a quest can be read as symbolic of values relevant to the individual in modern society. Loyalty to the king in accepting his dangerous task may be read in terms of the loyalty one may have to a friend or family member who may be ill or in need of aid. Though few people have the opportunity to go on a quest for the feather of an ogre in order to save the life of an ailing king, the hero's act of bravery teaches a life lesson in self-sacrifice— whether of time or of money or of life itself—in order to help others in need. His "loyalty" to his king may be an allegory for loyalty to a community in volunteering one's resources toward some goal for the greater good of society. The hero's generosity in unquestioningly agreeing to help each party he meets as he makes his journey can be interpreted in modern terms as the willingness to respond with compassion to the needs and problems of other people.

In addition to loyalty, bravery, courage, generosity, self-sacrifice, and dedication, "The Feathered Ogre," as do many fairy tales, places a high value on cleverness. Protagonists often overcome great odds through their cleverness in devising schemes to trick evil creatures. In this story it is the beautiful girl, the wife of the ogre and daughter of the innkeeper, who possesses the quality of cleverness, which, in effect, results in a happy ending for all of the good characters and a speedy demise for all of the evil characters. Before the hero even meets the girl, the prior at the monastery describes her as "a bright girl." Indeed, her intelligence is demonstrated by the scheme she devises in order to ensure the safety of the hero, to obtain several of the ogre's feathers, to draw out answers to each of the four questions, and to flee successfully from the ogre's cave with both her own life and the hero's.

The cleverness of the innkeeper's daughter in tricking the ogre may be translated into the value of well-thought-out solutions to a variety of problems one faces throughout life. While the ogre has the physical ability to devour both the girl and the man, it is her intelligence that triumphs over the ogre's brute power. Whereas the ogre's only resource seems to be the threat of eating every human being he sees, the girl and the man enjoy the benefits of intelligent, thoughtful problem-solving skills.

All of the virtues of the hero, as well as of the heroine, are in the service of performing "good deeds" in order to stamp out evil and help others out of their predicaments. The hero's initial act of volunteering to obtain a feather from the ogre is a good deed in itself, as it is for the purpose of curing the king of his illness. Obtaining the solutions to each of the four problems posed by the innkeeper, the ferry man, the two noblemen, and the friars is a good deed, which benefits each of these characters. The value placed on "good deeds" in this story is further emphasized in the solution to the problem of the friars in the monastery. In order to expose the Devil, who lives among them disguised as a priest, the friars must all do "good deeds" so that the Devil will be found out as the only one not doing good deeds and can then be expelled from the monastery; "the friars all did one good deed after another until the Devil finally fled." The message here is that society as a whole can benefit from good deeds on the part of individuals.

Finally, while material wealth and marriage to a "beautiful girl" are oversimplified images of what constitutes happiness in life, the reward from the king and the impending marriage can be read allegorically as representing the rewards of a virtuous life, which, in reality, may come in more abstract, subtle, or complex forms than the concrete rewards of a fairy tale. Thus, while the specific elements of a fairy tale such as "The Feathered Ogre" may on the surface seem to have little relevance to the conditions of modern life, an allegorical perspective allows the reader to take away lessons in basic values, which remain timeless and universal. The function of the allegorical effect of the fairy tale is to provide a concise, shorthand narrative which may have applications to greater, more complex concerns facing the individual in society.

Source: Liz Brent, Critical Essay on "The Feathered Ogre," in *Short Stories for Students*, The Gale Group, 2001.

BOOKRAGS

Critical Essay #2

Korb has a master's degree in English literature and creative writing and has written for a wide variety of educational publishers. In the following essay, she discusses how the various elements of "The Feathered Ogre" are representative of the archetypal hero's journey.

In his introduction to his collection *Italian Folktales*, Calvino describes the typical folktale:

[T]hey offer, in their oft-repeated and constantly varying examinations of human vicissitudes, a general explanation of life preserved in the slow ripening of rustic consciences; these folk stories are the catalog of the potential destinies of men and women, especially for that stage in life when destiny is formed, i.e., youth, beginning with birth, which itself often foreshadows the future; then the departure from home, and finally, through the trials of growing up, the attainment of maturity and the proof of one's humanity.

The trajectory of "The Feathered Ogre" closely follows this pattern, but inspiredly so. As Calvino points out, "[a] regard for conventions and a free inventiveness are equally necessary in constructing a folktale. Once the theme is laid out there are certain steps required to reach a solution; [but] they are interchangeable ingredients." "The Feathered Ogre" includes both the quintessential fairy tale journey toward adulthood, as well as its own mystical elements in the fountain that once spewed gold and silver, and primarily in the overall power of the feathers to bring luck and good fortune to those who possess them.

The nameless hero of "The Feathered Ogre" is a young man who must leave the safety of his home and face danger in pursuit of an important quest. The man is an attendant to a king who has fallen ill. All that can save the king is the feather of an ogre who lives in a seven-chambered cave. The ogre "eats every human he sees," so everyone refuses to go and get a feather. Finally, the king—who represents the parental authority figure—asks "one of his most loyal and courageous attendants" and finds success. The attendant is willing to leave the security of the familiar and challenge the unknown. This setting out on adventure marks the hero's—in metaphoric terms, the child's—initial departure from the home.

Along the journey to the ogre's cave, the attendant meets several different people. Most of them ask him to bring them back a feather, and all of them ask him to find the answer to a perplexing problem. An innkeeper is curious about what happened to his daughter who "disappeared years ago." A ferry man needs to find out what he can do to finally get off the ferry. Two noblemen want to know why the fountain has dried up and no longer spews gold and silver. Each of these people can be seen as representative of different stages of a person's life. The innkeeper represents a person's essential need for food and shelter. His daughter's disappearance, with the potential lack of continuation of the business and the lack of his progeny, threatens the obtainment of these basics. If a man

cannot even keep his own daughter safe, how can he be expected to provide security for others? The ferry man stands for life's journey. He brings people from one side of the river to the other side, or from one stage of life to the succeeding stage. The noblemen represent the successful attainment of adulthood. They have time for leisure, for instance, meeting the attendant when they sit down to relax by the fountain. However, their interest in getting the fountain to continue to provide gold and silver also shows their desire for greater wealth and material comfort, which often is a part of adulthood.

By the time the attendant reaches the monastery, the last stop before facing the ogre, he is almost—metaphorically—grown. The monastery and the friars within clearly represent the power and civilizing force of faith and religion. Significantly, and unlike the other people the attendant has met, the friars lend him critical help. When the hero knocks on their door and tells his story, the friars are uncertain that he knows what perils lie ahead. The attendant *thinks* he is prepared: "I was told there are seven caves," he answers simply. "At the back of one of them is a door I'm to knock on and be greeted by the ogre." The prior immediately points out the attendant's naivete. "If you are unmindful of all the danger," he says, "you'll certainly lose your life." Only with the help of the friars will the attendant survive the ogre's lair. Only with the power of faith will the hero take the final steps to true adulthood. Like the other people the attendant has met along the journey, the friars ask him to find something out for them: why their monastery has been filled with strife for the last ten years when before that they had "lived here in peace for no telling how many years." Unlike the others, however, the friars do not ask the attendant to bring them a feather. The power of the feather, it would seem, applies only to earthly matters, not to spiritual ones.

With the advice of the friars, the attendant is able to complete the last leg of his journey to attain adulthood. The attendant "scaled a mountain" to reach the ogre's home, and this type of movement signifies the colossal difficulty of the task. After he makes his way into the seventh cave, he lights the candle the friars gave him—the tool by which he will illuminate his path and make the discoveries that will bring him to true maturity. With this tool, he finds the ogre's door. There he is met by the ogre's wife.

The ogre's wife, who turns out to be the innkeeper's missing daughter, is anything but a monster. This "bright" and "beautiful" girl lives in fear of her husband. Like the friars, she offers the hero lifesaving assistance by hiding him under the bed, obtaining the ogre's feathers, and getting the ogre to supply the answers to the hero's questions. Similar to the actions of the hero, the girl's appearance into the fairy tale is preordained, as is her flight to safety with the hero after his goals have been accomplished. According to Calvino, the fairy tale's summary includes "the persecution of the innocent and their subsequent vindication, which are the terms inherent in every life."

With the favorable completion of the quest, the hero has become an adult. Through effort and brave actions, he has acquired both the maturity and the humanity that are imperative to a successful society. As proof of his humanity, he imparts his solutions to those who requested his help. Once he had explained to the noblemen how to kill the snake that lived underground, "it wasn't long before the fountain was again spewing gold and silver." The feather that he carries causes the king to get well again. The

attendant's solution to the friars is perhaps most meaningful because of the actions it inspires, however.

"One of you is the Devil. You must start doing all the good you can, and he will flee."

The friars all did one good deed after another until the Devil finally fled.

Further proof of the attendant's maturity comes. The innkeeper, enormously pleased at the safe return of his daughter, offers her hand in marriage to the attendant. Thus, as Calvino writes in the Introduction, "love [is] unrecognized when first encountered." The attendant, however, doesn't immediately accept. His reaction, "Let me first take the king his feather and ask his permission," demonstrates the difficulty a newly mature person may have in renouncing the authority of the family homestead and accepting the responsibilities of adulthood. However, the king approves of the wedding. When he demonstrates this approval by doubling the attendant's reward, the attendant allows himself to fully embrace his new adult life. The attendant "took leave of him and returned to the inn." The hero's happy ending, intrinsically linked with that of the innkeeper's daughter, demonstrates the conclusion of Calvino's summary of the fairy tale:

The common fate of subjection to spells, or having one's existence predetermined by complex and unknown forces. This complexity pervades one's entire existence and forces one to struggle to free oneself, to determine one's own fate; at the same time we can liberate ourselves only if we can liberate other people, for this is *sine qua non* of one's own liberation.

With the hero's return to his betrothed, the archetypal fairy tale journey ends. However, Calvino chooses to continue the story. The ogre, who had set out in pursuit of his wife "fully intending to devour her and whoever was involved in her escape," gets his punishment. The ferry man learned from the attendant that in order to leave the ferry all he had to do was disembark before his passenger. The ogre boards the ferry and then is trapped as "off jumped the ferryman, and the ogre could no longer leave the boat." In his Note to the tale, Calvino acknowledges that "the ending with the retention of the ogre on the ferry is mine, but it does not strike me as arbitrary since the same happens in [a Brother Grimms' tale]." Indeed, the Calvino-imposed conclusion onto "The Feathered Ogre" is in accordance with the Italian folktale tradition of movement toward a "healing solution, a part of which is a quick and pitiless punishment of the malefactor." Calvino's ending is also symbolically congruent. Whereas earlier in the tale the ferry man had represented part of the hero's childhood journey to adulthood, now the new ferryman—the ogre—takes on an entirely new meaning. In ancient Greek mythology, the ferryman, Charon, was the person responsible for bringing the spirits of the dead across the River Styx to the gates of the Underworld. Similarly, the ogre ferryman now represents the end of life's journey, or death.

Source: Rena Korb, Critical Essay on "The Feathered Ogre," in *Short Stories for Students*, The Gale Group, 2001.

Critical Essay #3

Hamilton is an English teacher at Cary Academy, an innovative private school in Cary, North Carolina. In this essay she postulates that Calvino's post-structuralist fascination with the structural elements of short stories can be detected in his collection of Italian oral tales, Italian Folktales *(1956), years before he began to experiment more radically in his writing. His interest is especially evident in one of the shortest of the tales, "The Feathered Ogre*."

In 1927, when Italo Calvino was a young child, Vladimir Propp published his "Morphology of the Folktale," which outlines thirty-one possible stages, or elements, of the folktale. His discovery was groundbreaking and convincing, supported as it was with numerous examples from Russian folklore. Propp compared these story elements to the Russian formalist notion of the "morpheme," the smallest meaningful element of the sentence, on the level of the syllable. The formalists, in turn, had based their concept on the linguistic term for the smallest vocal unit, the "phoneme." Russian formalism valued form over content and prompted a movement to study linguistic form as an end in itself. Correspondingly, Propp focused on the smallest analyzable narrative element of the folktale, which he dubbed the "narrateme." All thirty-one folktale elements, or narratemes, that Propp identified do not appear in every Russian folktale, but those that do are always in sequence. In the second half of Propp's list, he includes the various stages of the hero's journey made popular by the late anthropological scholar Joseph Campbell.

Italo Calvino mentions Propp's contribution to the scholarship of the folktale in his introduction to *Italian Folktales*. And, not surprisingly, the narrative stages of the folktale "The Feathered Ogre" that Calvino includes in his anthology match at least eleven of Propp's later stages, those of the hero's journey. The tale begins with Propp's narrateme #9, when the hero learns of a "misfortune or lack"—in this case, the doctor's advise to obtain an ogre's feather to cure the sick king. The tale then proceeds through eleven more narratemes, as the hero leaves home (#11), gains advice and help along the way (#12), reacts to the advice (#13), reaches the place where he can find the needed object (#15), engages the villain in combat (#16, in this case via the ogre's wife), defeats the villain (#17), obtains the object (#19, the feathers), returns (#20), but is pursued by the villain (#21), gets rescued (#22, the ogre becomes trapped on the ferry), and then marries and is rewarded (#31). Altogether, this, as well as most of the other Italian tales Calvino collected, corresponds with Propp's narrateme cycle, despite any intention on Calvino's part: he was simply reporting variants of common folk tales. Nevertheless, Calvino noticed the patterns that emerged as he collected and studied the stories, and, in a 1967 essay called "Cybernetics and Ghosts," he mentions Propp again and states that in Italian folktales, as in Russian ones, all "tales were like variants of a single tale, and could be broken down into a limited number of narrative functions" like Propp's narratemes.

In this essay, Calvino compares the "fixed structures" or "prefabricated elements" of stories to mental processes, which could, like computer functions, lead to infinite

combinatorial groupings, though the number of discrete, separate elements was finite in number. In 1956 when he published the anthology of tales, Calvino recognized that narratemes were "interchangeable ingredients" and that it was the narrator's job "to pile them up like bricks in a wall" to form a story that will "reach a solution." Did Calvino have any inkling then that he would depart radically from this prescribed form of the tale in his own fiction? Is there evidence, even as early as 1956, in a story ostensibly not even his own, that Calvino would push the concept of interchangeable narratemes to an extreme that Propp could not have foreseen?

Certainly the idea of "story units" was germinating at the time Calvino was working on his collection of Italian tales. The French structuralists were building upon the ideas of the Russian formalists regarding sentence structural units (morphemes) and Propp's narrative units (narratemes). One of them, anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss, identified the elemental structure of myth, which he termed "mythemes." Ultimately, he devised a new field of study that he called "structural anthropology," which applies structuralist precepts to myth. He outlined the basis of what would become French structuralism in his landmark 1955 article "The Structural Study of Myth," published just months before Calvino's anthology of Italian Folktales. In "Cybernetics and Ghosts," Calvino acknowledges the influence on his later work of anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss's writings.

According to Levi-Strauss, myth, like language, comprises "gross constituent units" that are organized in ritual ways. In myth, the units often appear in symmetrical relationships, consisting of binary pairs, or opposites, and other common structures. Claude Levi-Strauss illustrated his theory with the example of the *Oedipus* myth, which he breaks down into mythemes, such as "Oedipus marries his mother Jocasta" and "Antigone buries her brother, Polynices." Levi-Strauss strips away the sequence of narrative progression and isolates these mythemes as discrete units in order to reveal the essential relations or ideas being portrayed by the myth. These two units of *Oedipus* express, according to Levi-Strauss, the mytheme or idea of "overrating blood relations." Had Calvino applied similar analysis to the story "The Feathered Ogre," he might have identified such mythemes as the hero agreeing to bring a feather to the noblemen, the ferryman, and the king, and the friars' offer of advice on how to obtain the help of the ogre's wife to get the feathers. He then might have discovered their common theme of "spontaneous generosity," using Levi-Strauss's methods. Whether or not Calvino applied the anthropological structuralist approach to derive common themes in specific stories, it is apparent from his introduction to the anthology that Calvino had an affinity for recognizing the building blocks of story, or narratemes.

Levi-Strauss also advocated comparing variants of myths to obtain greater confidence in determining the universal social significance of a given mytheme. Italo Calvino accepted this challenge when he undertook to create his anthology of Italian folktales. He searched exhaustively for new variants, becoming, as he said, "gradually possessed by a kind of mania, an insatiable hunger for more and more versions and variants" and ultimately he accumulated "mountains of narratives (always basically the same ones and amounting altogether to some fifty types)." He compared the many versions he found in order to choose the most "unusual, beautiful, and original texts" for his

anthology. "The Feathered Ogre" is one of his finest choices, especially in regard to its unusual narratemes.

In compiling his tales, however, Calvino committed a crime in the eyes of cultural anthropologists: like the Brothers Grimm, he could not refrain from modifying the folktales he retold, embellishing them to meet his own literary standards. In the introduction to the anthology of tales, he justifies his action by saying that he was "guided by the Tuscan proverb . . . 'The tale is not beautiful if nothing is added to it.'" As Calvino "touched up" or "enriched" the texts and tried to make them more "plastic," he did not feel constrained to use any particular version; rather, he merged the variants and then polished the resulting tale to make it better. He asserts that he did so with the aim of "restoring its lost originality;" he sought to preserve the original character. His emendations were not appreciated by later folklorists, such as Max Luöthi, who complained that in revising the stories, Calvino "often takes liberties by adding poetic embellishments and insertions and thereby exceeds the limits of the permissible." For his part, Calvino did not regret his alterations, for, as he points out in the introduction, he considers his authorial role as simply another "link in the anonymous chain without end by which folktales are handed down."

Perhaps Calvino derived his communal sense of authorship from another of the French structuralists, Roland Barthes, who, like Levi-Strauss, was not yet renowned but whose work Calvino had read as early as 1953. Barthes at that time was beginning to conceive his theory of the "death of the author." In *Writing Degree Zero* (1953), Barthes avowed that "no one can . . . pretend to insert his freedom as a writer into the resistant medium of language because, behind the latter, the whole of history stands unified and complete in the manner of a natural order." According to Barthes, the author's message is molded by history and can only find expression through words and phrases already in use. The author, then, merely expounds on contemporary ideas, using contemporary language, and does not really invent anything new. Only through style can the writer express his or her own personal contribution to writing, since style comes from personal history. The author's style, Barthes explains, "rises up from the writer's myth-laden depths and unfolds beyond his area of control." Although it would not be until 1968 that Barthes would literally announce the "death of the author," his earlier works de-emphasize the importance of the writer, in favor of language, "the corpus of prescriptions and habits common to all the writers of a period." Calvino's comment that he is part of "an anonymous chain" of storytellers is consistent with Barthes' concept of the author as linked to an era, an ideology, and a mode of speaking. In that "great chain" of writers, Calvino represents the link where literary works entered a new era, that of the formalist, whose primary interest is in form, not content.

In the same interview Calvino admits that he is "not attracted to psychology," but rather to "the whole mosaic in which man is set, the interplay of relationships, the design that emerges from the squiggles on the carpet." Certainly Calvino's interest at the time of the interview lay in the interplay and design of story structure, as evident in works such as *Cosmicomics* (1965), where characters are derived from mathematical formulae; *The Castle of Crossed Destinies* (1969), where characters speak using Tarot cards; and *Invisible Cities* (1972), an elaborate allegory of the architectural nature of narrative. *If on*

a Winter's Night a Traveler (1979), a brilliant novella that pursues multiple, coinciding narrative paths, would come another decade later. In these and other Calvino novels and stories, "narratemes" are liberated from narrow, linear narrative straits and sent to play in a fantasyland governed by a bizarre new physics of narrative form.

Calvino's interest in narrative form is most evident in the starkly symmetrical narrative structure of "The Feathered Ogre." In that folktale, the "loyal and courageous attendant" (not the smallest or youngest one, as is often the case in folktales) has four meetings on his way with people who give him advice for his mission: the innkeeper, the ferryman, two noblemen, and the friars. As the ogre's wife plucks feathers off her husband for the interloper, she gets advice back from the ogre, in reverse order: the friars, the noblemen, the ferryman, and then the innkeeper. The escaping pair visit them in reverse order as well. Whether or not this structure originates with the folktale or in Calvino's modifications, the story's fine balance attracted his attention and merited inclusion in his anthology. "The Feathered Ogre" attests to Calvino's appreciation of balanced story elements in carefully crafted narrative structures. Like the artist who learns to dissect a body in order to better understand its skeletal system and musculature, the writer, too, serves an apprenticeship with the morphology of the folktales. As his artistic scalpel moved along the sinews and joints of folktales, Calvino developed a literary surgeon's intuition that would find fuller expression in his post-structuralist novels and stories.

Calvino's writing eventually would epitomize the belief he expressed in "Cybernetics and Ghosts" that "[l]iterature is a combinatorial game that pursues the possibilities implicit in its own material." In other words, Calvino values the "play" of literary forms. Although he could not fully explore this interest when he compiled the anthology, his "architectural" approach can be seen in his choice of stories with unusual structural elements. To this end, "The Feathered Ogre" is a prime example, for not only are the elements balanced chronologically but certain of them are inverted, demonstrating the opposite form expected in the typical folktale. Calvino was familiar with the Stith Thompson motif index (1955-1958), which he mentions in his introduction. From this exhaustive compilation of known story lines and motifs, Calvino would have known that, for example, the hero is usually the youngest, weakest, least likely candidate, and not the "most loyal and courageous" as it is in "The Feathered Ogre." In addition, in each case the people he meets along the way ask for an ogre's feather for no particular reason, before casually mentioning a real problem. Usually, it's the other way around: the hero meets someone with a problem, and he promises to help in return for advice or a magic talisman from the stranger. In this story, the people do not seem to recognize that they have a problem: the innkeeper is nonchalant about his daughter's disappearance, and the nobles do not urgently need to get the fountain of gold and silver repaired. "The Feathered Ogre" is a structural anomaly in this regard, which accounts for the reason Calvino included it. This is one more instance in which a particular folktale rendered by Calvino offers evidence of his fascination with narrative anatomy.

Although he would not align himself with the structuralists for about another decade, Calvino's rendering of the traditional Italian folk tale "The Feathered Ogre" attests to his fascination with story structure. This fascination would lead him down the path of the kind of narrative experimentation that typifies his later works. For Calvino, the folklore

collection project proved as important in terms of studying the inner workings of myth and tale as it was in terms of representing Italy in the annals of folklore collections and in recording an important aspect of Italian cultural history. It was the start of a trajectory of syntactic development that has its beginnings in a humble folktale with auspicious features.

Source: Carole Hamilton, Critical Essay on "The Feathered Ogre," in *Short Stories for Students*, The Gale Group, 2001.

Topics for Further Study

Find a book of *Grimm's Fairy Tales* and pick out one story. In what ways is this story similar to, or different from, "The Feathered Ogre"? In what ways does it contain the elements of brevity, repetition, and rhythm that Calvino valued in the Italian folk tale?

Write an original fairy tale that includes similar elements to those of "The Feathered Ogre," or other fairy tales with which you are familiar. What elements of a story are necessary in order for it to be considered a fairy tale? Include these in your own fairy tale.

As well as being a writer, Italo Calvino was once a resistance fighter against fascism in Italy during World War II. Find out more about this period in Italian history and the role of resistance movements during that period.

Calvino's *Italian Folk Tales*, in which "The Feathered Ogre" was first published, is a transcription of stories from the oral tradition in Italian culture. The oral tradition of storytelling still exists today in such forms as family stories that grandparents or parents repeat and pass on to each new generation of the family. Recall stories you've been told that constitute part of the "oral tradition" of your own family. "Transcribe" one of these stories from the oral to the written form. How does the story change when written on paper? How does the context of the telling of family stories contribute to the effect of the story?

Compare and Contrast

1950s: When Calvino first begins regularly publishing fiction, during the post-War era, Italian neorealism is the dominant literary style. Neorealism is a reaction to fascism and focuses on the portrayal of personal experiences of World War II and war-torn Italy in the aftermath of the War.

1990s: Calvino's career spans many developments in literary history over the second half of the twentieth century. By the time of his death in 1985, postmodern and poststructuralist literary styles have become prevalent in literature, in part influenced by the contribution of his own experimental novels.

Early Twentieth Century: During Calvino's youth and early adulthood, Italy is ruled by a king, who eventually institutes a parliament under the fascist Benito Mussolini.

Late Twentieth Century: After World War II, Mussolini is shot, and the king later deposed in favor of a more democratic parliamentary government, characterized by many parties.

1950s: Although many anthropologists and ethnographers have collected and transcribed stories from the oral tradition of Italian peasants, before Calvino's collection and retelling of Italian folktales—first published in 1956—there are no definitive compilations equivalent to the work of the Brothers Grimm in collecting and retelling traditional German folktales.

1990s: Calvino's 1956 publication of *Fiabe Italiane* becomes internationally recognized as the definitive text on Italian folktales. Calvino achieves his goal of creating an Italian equivalent of the works of the Brothers Grimm.

Nineteenth Century: Folktales such as "The Feathered Ogre" are originally developed by generations of local peasant storytellers, mostly female and often illiterate, who serve an important role in their town, village or community, with their talent for remembering countless tales and their storytelling skills.

Twentieth Century: As modern society becomes more literate, the oral tradition fades, and the work of anthropologists, ethnographers, and writers such as Calvino plays a crucial role in preserving cultural texts, which would otherwise have been lost.

What Do I Read Next?

The Path to the Nest of the Spiders (1947), by Italo Calvino, is an early collection of his short stories, based on his experiences as a Resistance fighter against fascism in Italy during World War II.

Italian Folk Tales (1956), consisting of transcriptions of Italian folk tales from the oral tradition collected and retold by Italo Calvino, has become a definitive text, equivalent to Grimm's collections of German folktales.

If on a Winter's Night a Traveler (1981), Calvino's well-known novel, experiments with narrative techniques and the art of storytelling.

Six Memos for the Next Millenium (1988), by Italo Calvino, includes five of the six lectures that the author had been preparing at the time of his death. These essays include the topics of lightness, quickness, visibility, and multiplicity.

Why Read the Classics? (1999) by Italo Calvino, published posthumously, provides history and criticism of classic international literature.

Understanding Italo Calvino (1993) by Beno Weiss provides a basic introduction to the complex, experimental narrative techniques developed by Calvino in many of his novels.

Calvino: The Writer as Fablemaker (1979) by Stella Maria Adler, with a preface by Dante Della Terza, provides criticism and interpretation of Calvino's stories, focusing on the role of the narrator in the written folk tale.

Further Study

Brink, Andre Philippus, *The Novel: Language and Narrative from Cervantes to Calvino*, New York University Press, 1998.

This work is a history of narration in the novel from Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote de la Mancha* (often considered the first novel) through Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*.

Calvino, Italo, ed.,*Fantastic Tales: Visionary and Everyday*, Pantheon Books, 1997.

This collection of international short stories of the fantastic, or supernatural, has an introduction by Calvino, and includes such authors as Edgar Allan Poe, Ambrose Bierce, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Hans Christian Anderson, and many others.

Grimm, Jacob, *Grimm's Tales for Young and Old: The Complete Stories*, Doubleday, 1977.

This is a modern translation by Ralph Manheim of the German folk tales originally collected by the Brothers Grimm.

Hague, Michael, *The Book of Dragons*, Morrow Junior Books, 1995.

This collection of short stories about dragons includes "The Dragon and the Enchanted Filly," an Italian folktale retold by Calvino.

Rottensteiner, Franz, ed., *The Slaying of the Dragon: Modern Tales of the Playful Imagination*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984.

This collection of modern short stories of the fantastic, by such authors as Jorge Luis Borges, Carlos Fuentes, Donald Barthelme, and Joyce Carol Oates, includes "Adam, One Afternoon" by Calvino. Slonim, Marc, *Modern Italian Short Stories*, Simon and Schuster, 1954.This collection of short stories by modern Italian writers in translation includes "Adam, One Afternoon" by Calvino.

BOOKRAGS

Bibliography

Calvino, Italo, "Cybernetics and Ghosts," in *The Uses of Literature*, Harcourt Brace, Inc., 1982, pp. 3-27.

———, Introduction to *Italian Folktales*, Harcourt Brace, Inc., 1956, 1980, pp. xv-xxxii.

———, "Quickness," from *Six Memos for the Next Millenium*, Harvard University Press, 1988, pp. 35-37.

———, "Two Interviews on Science and Literature," in *The Uses of Literature*, Harcourt Brace, Inc., 1982, pp. 28-38.

Luöthi, Max, *The European Folktales: Form and Nature*, Institute for the Study of Human Issues, Inc., 1982.

Ricci, Franco, "Italo Calvino," in *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, Volume 196: *Italian Novelists Since World War II, 1965-1990*, Gale Research, 1999, pp. 50-67.

Sontag, Susan, ed., *A Barthes Reader*, Hill and Wang, 1982.

Copyright Information

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

Project Editor
David Galens

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

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

Data Capture
Beverly Jendrowski

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

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

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

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

©1997-2002; ©2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc.

Gale and Design® and Thomson Learning™ are trademarks used herein under license.

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

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.
No part of this work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any

form or by any means—graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, Web distribution or information storage retrieval systems—without the written permission of the publisher.

For permission to use material from this product, submit your request via Web at http://www.gale-edit.com/permissions, or you may download our Permissions Request form and submit your request by fax or mail to:

Permissions Department
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535

Permissions Hotline:
248-699-8006 or 800-877-4253, ext. 8006
Fax: 248-699-8074 or 800-762-4058

Since this page cannot legibly accommodate all copyright notices, the acknowledgments constitute an extension of the copyright notice.

While every effort has been made to secure permission to reprint material and to ensure the reliability of the information presented in this publication, The Gale Group, Inc. does not guarantee the accuracy of the data contained herein. The Gale Group, Inc. accepts no payment for listing; and inclusion in the publication of any organization, agency, institution, publication, service, or individual does not imply endorsement of the editors or publisher. Errors brought to the attention of the publisher and verified to the satisfaction of the publisher will be corrected in future editions.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". © 1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". © 1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

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

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

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

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

Other Features

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

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

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

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

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

Citing Short Stories for Students

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We Welcome Your Suggestions

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

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